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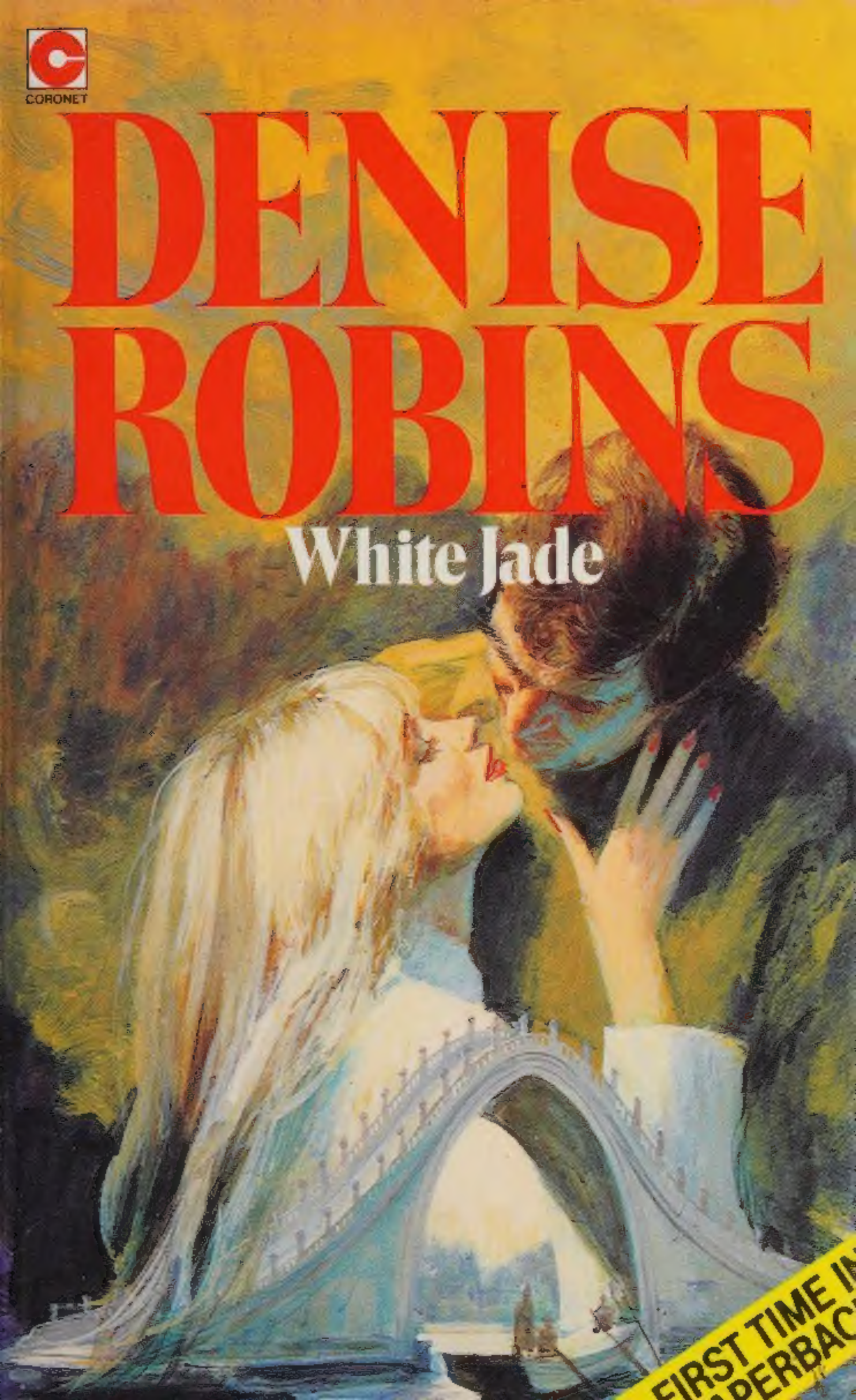
White Jade



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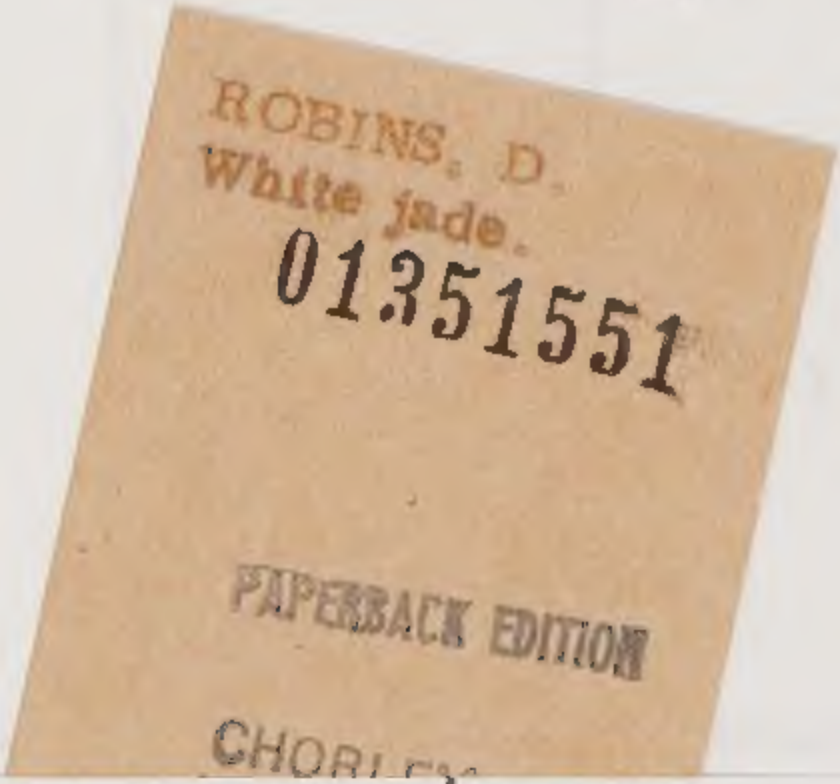

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WHITE JADE

Garvin shuddered and looked down at the white girl whom he meant to save if he could. And then for the first time he saw her face. For an instant in petrified silence he stared at her, and the blood in his veins seemed turned to ice. It was Patricia Moreland who lay naked, agonised, bound to that altar before that frightful idol. Her face was livid; her great blue eyes stared, half-mad with terror, up at the ceiling. Her golden hair, wet with some sort of sticky scent they had used, clung damply to her head. Garvin could not believe his eyes. Then a cry broke from him, of horror—of fear.

'Pat . . . you . . . great heavens!' She turned to him. The unexpected sight of Garvin Stewart, after all the horrors through which she had just passed, proved too much for her. She just said:

'Kill me . . . quickly . . .' then fainted.

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WHITE JADE

Denise Robins

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1

In Shang Tao the morning was blazing hot.

Shang Tao, brooding, mysterious city of the yellow men in civilised China. Patricia Moreland, who had only arrived in Shang Tao yesterday—her first trip to the Orient—thought it the most wonderful city in the world.

She sat on the verandah of the biggest European hotel in the concession—the Imperial—sipping her orange-squash through a straw, and looking at the narrow street before her. The heat did not affect her unpleasantly. Clad in the thinnest of white dresses, a white hat on her fair head; the striped awning over the verandah and many electric fans helping to cool her; she was content. She scarcely spoke a word to the tall man in the white drill suit who drank a gin and lime beside her. He was Sir Eric Hughes—Inspector-General of Customs at Shang Tao; and he was madly in love with her. But Patricia had eyes only for the cosmopolitan crowd passing to and fro the entrance of the Imperial.

Tourists with sun-spectacles and topees, with their Tartar guides; Chinese, some with pigtails, in blue cotton baggy trousers, hands folded in their wide sleeves; Chinese ladies with painted faces, slanting eyes, and embroidered jackets; the richer yellow men in their rickshaws, drawn by bare-legged coolies. Up and down the street they passed; under a sky of intense blue; under a sun of molten gold. And the morning seemed to be brilliantly alive—alive with colour; with the romance of the Orient; with strange harsh cries and the mysterious pad of footsteps; the strong, subtle perfume of China.

Sir Eric Hughes looked at the perfect profile of the girl; at her white, delicate skin, with just the pretty pink of healthy youth on her cheeks; at the pale gold of her hair, and the rose

pink of her lips—and he had no interest whatsoever in China.

'Pat,' he said huskily, 'why won't you love me?'

She turned to him as though dragged from her dreams. Her eyes—blue as the sky, under beautiful long lashes—met his gloomy ones, and then she finished her orange-squash with a little laugh.

'Oh, Eric, don't let's go all over that again.'

'But I love you—I'm mad about you, Pat, and——'

'Eric, don't—please. I don't care for you in that way. I told you that on the boat coming over.'

He set his teeth.

'I almost wish you hadn't come,' he said. 'I can't be content with your friendship and not have your love. It maddens me!'

She turned her eyes to the noisy, jostling crowd in the street again. She sighed. Eric was such a dear . . . if only he would not make love to her. She half wished she could return his affection. But it was impossible. She had come out to China with Mrs. Mason, his widowed sister, for a six months' stay in Shang Tao just for pure love of the East. It had always been her desire to see China. Her father had lived in Peking for many years, and had told her, when she was a child, of the beauty and magic of that imperial city. Now Mr. Moreland was dead; Patricia had no other living relatives, and had found herself, at the age of twenty-three, with a small private income and nothing to do.

When Sonia Mason, an old school-friend, had told her that she was returning to Shang Tao with Sir Eric, her brother, and had invited Pat to go with them, she had been immensely thrilled with the thought and had accepted at once.

The one thing that had spoiled the trip so far had been Sir Eric's disastrous passion for her which she could not return.

'I believe you're in love with some other fellow,' Sir Eric said to her moodily. 'You're so lovely, my dear, so sweet—you're made for love. There must be some man in your life.'

She turned to him again. She was flushing now.

'Perhaps there was—once. There isn't now.'

'You mean you've had an unhappy affair? But is there a man on earth who would not return *your* love, Pat?'

Patricia was crimson now. She looked down at her hands half nervously.

'No—I—don't ask me about it—please. But I—oh, I suppose I've been very heartless and proud. I never wanted to marry and I—there was one man who cared for me, and I ... treated him rather badly. I—was sorry after. Then it was too late. That's all.'

Silence. Patricia turned to the street; watched two Chinamen meet, kow-tow to each other ceremoniously; stand and chat; their hands folded in their sleeves; thin flat yellow faces bland and inscrutable. The Orient thrilled her ... the yellow men intrigued her. It was all queer, exciting; sometimes terrifying in this subtle country. She could not help remembering Garvin Stewart, the man of whom she had been speaking to Eric ... remembering how he had loved China. Once he had lived in Shanghai, and the mystery and ancient splendour of China had gripped him; held him in its eternal thrall.

Why was it she had treated Garvin so badly? In her fashion she had loved him. Three years ago she had met him in London, just after he had come back from Shanghai, to study medicine at Bart's. She recalled him; tall, lithe, undeniably good-looking, with a boyish charm that had always attracted women. He had loved her passionately ... oh, so much more madly than any man had loved her before or since. And once or twice she had almost fallen under his spell.

Used to the admiration of men, spoiled and petted, a darling of the gods, she had used him just as she had used others; to amuse her. Her love of freedom and independence always conquered the romantic side. She had—she frankly, shame-facedly admitted it now—led Garvin Stewart on; then told him she would not marry him.

Sitting here this morning in Shang Tao with Sir Eric Hughes, Patricia found herself only too vividly recalling her last scene with Garvin. How horror-stricken he had been when she had turned him down; how scornful his boyish face had grown; how white and hard. He had said:

'Pat, you are the most beautiful woman in the world; up till now I've worshipped you; made a goddess of you; dreamed of

doing great things for you. But now I know you have a mean, selfish, callous nature. One day, Pat, you will be punished for the way you've played with me. I almost wish I could punish you myself. But I don't suppose I shall ever look into your lovely, treacherous eyes again. Good-bye.'

She shivered at the remembrance of that bitter speech. Garvin had been a soft, adoring lover. But Garvin could be a bitter, implacable enemy. She had not seen him from that day to this. It had all happened three years ago. And she had never forgotten; had felt remorse gnawing at her on many occasions. She did not know where he had gone or what he was doing. She only knew he had left Bart's, ended his career as a medical student. He had had a little money of his own. Perhaps he had come back to China. Perhaps she was nearer to him to-day than she had been for three years.

She suddenly rose to her feet.

'It's rather hot, Eric. I think I'll get back to Sonia. She's waiting for me at the bungalow. I——'

She paused in the middle of her speech. She went white to the lips; clutched the back of the basket chair in which she had just been sitting. Her eyes focused on the tall figure of an Englishman in khaki-coloured drill suit, with a topee in his hand. He was just coming through the swing-doors of the Imperial on to the verandah. A huge Chinaman in European clothes, carrying a parasol and wearing spectacles, was beside him.

The Englishman came nearer Patricia. He had not seen her. She heard him talking to his companion, and his voice was painfully familiar.

'Very well, Mr. Chai, we will meet to-night at the Blue Moon. I shall be delighted.'

'Your honourable presence, Mr. Stewart, will graciously brighten an unworthy meeting-place,' the Chinaman replied in a bland oily voice.

Patricia's heart beat violently. She took an instinctive step forward.

'Garvin——' she faltered.

The young Englishman in the khaki suit started and looked up. For an instant he stared at the slender, white-clad figure

of the golden-haired girl. Then he stiffened. His sun-bronzed face seemed to grow set and hard.

He deliberately ignored Pat and turned to Chai Yin.

'Did you enjoy your recent trip to Hankow?' he asked casually.

He passed on, down the steps of the hotel into the sunlight beside the Chinaman.

Patricia swallowed hard. She was white and shaken. She had seen Garvin . . . and Garvin had seen her. He had cut her dead. And once he had kissed her feet.

'Anything wrong, my dear?' Sir Eric Hughes asked, anxiously regarding her sudden pallor.

She pulled herself together.

'No—nothing,' she said, with a hard little laugh. 'Order the car, will you, Eric?'

II

Garvin Stewart walked down the street as far as the corner with his Chinese friend. He conversed with him casually. But inwardly he was in a tumult. The sight of Patricia Moreland had upset his equilibrium much more than he would have cared to confess.

How beautiful she looked; lovelier than ever. And how terribly he had cared for her. His handsome eyes became bitter and hard. She had been just a heartless flirt; a coquette. Three years ago he had imagined she had broken his heart. He had come back to China not caring whether he lived or died. But that feeling had passed. In its place had come a terrible desire to punish her; to make her repent her coquetry. No woman had a right to lead a man on, take all he had to give; then send him away. The burning passion he had had for her seemed to die down to a colder flame; an almost cruel thirst to take and break her; to see her at his feet, begging him for mercy.

Garvin knew and understood the East. He spoke Chinese. He was a born diplomat and adored an adventure. Already he and his colleagues had been able to impart some very valuable information to the Foreign Office at home. China was restless; there were murmurs of dissatisfaction with the white man which Garvin knew full well would rise to a dangerous crescendo very shortly. Long before Europe heard of it, Garvin knew of the spark which was to burst into flame first at Hankow and Canton; then Shanghai.

His friendship with Mr. Chai Yin had started a year ago and had been of immense value to Garvin. Chai Yin was an important man in Shang Tao; a wealthy merchant with considerable knowledge of the network of intrigue and the vast country of the yellow man, and an English public school training behind him.

On the little finger of his left hand, Garvin wore a strange ring; a green stone engraved with the secret sign of Mazdaism, which was the ancient worship of the God of Fire. This ring had been handed down to Garvin from his father, who had discovered it many years ago in China whilst excavating for curios. Garvin had found it of great value to him. It was regarded by many sects in China as a sacred symbol. The wearer of it would never be touched.

Chai Yin stood in awe of that ring. But just how far his friendliness to Garvin went, the Englishman was not to know. It is impossible to gauge the sincerity of the Oriental. Garvin, at any rate, suspected the knife of hostility always behind the bland oily flattery of the big Chinaman.

He parted with Mr. Chai Yin at the corner of the street, then turned and walked to the Shang Tao Club, where he 'roomed' with William Trensham (more commonly known as Bill), who had been an old college friend of his.

He found Bill in his bedroom; the floor strewn with clothes, and Bill—who was a tall, fair-haired fellow with a pair of humorous blue eyes—sitting on top of a trunk, smoking.

'Lor' love us, Bill!' ejaculated Garvin, hands in his trouser pockets, staring at his friend. 'Packing already?'

'Well, we start at dawn, don't we, Garvin?'

'I suppose we do,' said Garvin.

Bill pulled a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and looked up at the older man.

'What's up, old chap? Don't you want to do this trip to the desert?'

'Yes, I do.'

'It'll be a marvellous adventure, and we might come back with a fortune,' said Bill enthusiastically. 'The Nobi Desert is supposed to be rich in minerals.'

'And full of the bones of the men who've tried to cross it,' said Garvin.

'You're cheery,' said Bill, grimacing. 'What's bitten you, Garvin?'

Garvin flung himself down on the bed and stuck a pipe between his teeth.

'I've seen Patricia Moreland at the Imperial with Hughes,

the Customs fellow,' he blurted out.

'Have you, by Jove!' said Trensham.

And Bill knew, then, why Garvin was wrapped in gloom. He had heard all about Patricia Moreland. He despised her. Any woman who could lead old Garvin on and turn him down ... it was rotten ... a splendid chap like Garvin. Bill literally adored his friend. There was no man more courageous, more quick-witted, and, at the same time, more sweet-tempered and lovable than Garvin Stewart.

Patricia Moreland ... bah! Bill did not see why Garvin should worry about the meeting

'Don't imagine I'm miserable about it,' said Garvin, clenching his teeth on the stem of his pipe. 'I'm not. But when I saw her there—looking so fair, so delicate, so beautiful—and I remembered her rotten treatment of me—I felt I'd like to get my own back, Bill Not a very worthy thought.'

'I hope you do get your own back one day,' said Bill bluntly. 'But I shouldn't trouble about her.'

Garvin shut his eyes. Trouble about her! God! The bitter thing to him was his inability to forget her or put any other woman in her place. He wanted to hurt her . . hurt her ... in order to assuage his own long pain.

Roughly he said:

'Well, we'll be out of Shang Tao this time to-morrow. I'm meeting Chai Yin and Ming Ho at the Blue Moon to-night. When Chai Yin gets a bit drowsy over his poppy-pipe I may get a bit of information out of him. I think there will be trouble in China by the next full moon. By that time we'll be back from our desert trip. Now just let's get the map, Bill, and work out our line of action.'

Trensham imagined Garvin had put Patricia Moreland out of his mind. He fetched a map and eagerly pored over it with his friend. Bill was keen to cross the Nobi Desert with Garvin. They had planned it all a fortnight ago. They were taking two Tartar guides and two Chinese boys, two camels and some baggage-ponies. They intended to cross the great Nobi Desert in the direction of the Ki-Shan Mountains, where they would prospect for aluminium.

The disadvantages of the climate and insects in the Nobi

Desert were terrific. But that very knowledge made Garvin Stewart all the more eager to try his luck. Life to Garvin was a thrilling adventure. He had juggled with death before now, and he was too energetic to wish to remain in Shang Tao doing nothing.

When they had made their final plans, Bill Trensham stretched his arms over his head and yawned.

'Well, I'm for my cold tub and a change of kit. What about coming down to the Ki-Shoon Café tonight, Garvin? There's a peach of a girl there—and——'

'No thanks, old chap,' broke in Garvin shortly. 'You go and find your peach of a girl. Women don't interest me, as you know.'

But he was extraordinarily interested in the thought of Patricia Moreland that night. He was haunted by the memory of her; the delicate, proud face with the deep blue eyes and fair head. How startled, almost afraid she had been when she had seen him.

Garvin's strong brown hand clenched.

'One day you and I will meet again, Patricia,' he said to himself. 'And then, who knows——?'

In the spacious and luxurious house of Chai Yin, the merchant, Mr. Chai sat cross-legged on a satin cushion beside a little lacquered table, drinking *samshu*, which had just been served to him hot in a small bowl by a waiting woman. *Samshu* is a strong spirit distilled from rice, and a favourite drink of the Chinese. Opposite Chai Yin stood a very small thin yellow man in black cotton trousers and coat. He was hideously ugly. He squinted; his nose was broad and flat; two teeth in the front of his mouth were missing. But he was Ming Ho, favourite, confidential servant to Chai Yin; a sinister and cunning figure of immense use to the fat, prosperous merchant.

Mr. Chai Yin had changed from his European clothes into a rich, embroidered robe, and looked more like his honourable ancestors whose paintings adorned the walls.

'I have special work for you to do, Ming Ho,' he said in his native tongue. 'Listen well.'

'I listen and learn, O Master,' said Ming Ho, kow-towing.

'On the verandah of the Hotel Imperial this morning there I saw a goddess,' said Chai Yin softly. 'A white goddess, Ming Ho, seated beside the English toad, Sir Eric Hughes of the Customs. I would know more about this white goddess; who she is; where she lives, what her movements are. I would see her again.'

'Your wishes shall be obeyed, O Gracious Master.'

'So beautiful,' said Chai Yin, rocking himself to and fro and speaking in a dreamy voice. His black, slanting eyes were pin-pricks in his yellow face. 'Slender as the young tree, white as ivory, with hair of gold; as golden as the heart of the lotus, with lips redder than the poppy—she was more exquisite than words can describe, than brush could paint.'

Ming Ho bowed low, hands hidden in his sleeves.

'Is it written, O Master, that this jewel of Europe shall wait your pleasure?'

'It is written,' said Chai Yin, chanting the words. 'Even that I might take this Lotus-flower into my honourable house as its august mistress. We shall see.'

Then he opened his eyes and spoke more sharply.

'To-night at the Blue Moon I meet the Englishman, Garvin Stewart, to smoke a pipe with him, Ming Ho.'

Ming Ho's squinting eyes suddenly flamed.

'Beware of the white man, O my Master.'

'For what reason has Chai Yin to beware?'

'I have suspicions that Garvin Stewart is a man who drags the secrets from the heart of China.'

'Nonsense,' said Chai Yin. 'He is a simple man.'

'I am not sure, Master,' said Ming Ho.

'When you *are* sure you can speak of this again. Until then I am a friend to the Englishman. Remember, dog, he wears the ring of the great God of Fire.'

Ming Ho hurriedly hid his face with the wing of his sleeve, and departed. But he hated Garvin Stewart. He did not intend to rest until his suspicions had been proven and he could sever the friendship between the Englishman and Chai Yin.

III

One day, about a week later, Patricia Moreland visited Canhung with Sir Eric Hughes, who had to go to that city on important business affairs.

Sonia Mason remained in Shang Tao.

'I'm not so keen on travelling about in the heat and dust—you go, my dear,' she had said. 'Eric will look after you, and you've always wanted to see China, so take this chance.'

Patricia was glad she had taken the chance when she was in Canhung. The city was on the sea; more imposing and interesting than Shang Tao, and considerably larger.

As she drove in Sir Eric's car through the British Concession toward the Consulate, Pat felt a queer depression steal over her. She was becoming used to the sight of yellow faces; to the queer thousand and one sounds and scents of the Chinese city. And now that the first flush of interest had worn off, she found herself thinking more about Garvin. Her pride had been hurt by the way in which he had cut her at the Imperial. She presumed that he hated her now. That worried Pat. She was not used to being hated or ignored.

A sudden commotion at the corner of the street down which they were gliding, roused her attention.

'What is it, Eric?' she asked.

'I'm not quite sure,' he said, his thin, austere face a trifle worried. 'But I fancy they are Cantonese strikers—that crowd. I'm told that trouble is brewing in Canhung, Pat. I wish I'd left you at home.'

His words gave her a slight thrill of fear. But Patricia Moreland was no coward. Despite any feminine faults or follies, she was a resolute young woman. She leaned out of the car, staring at the crowd of yellow men who seemed to be

collecting round the car, and her eyes dilated with excitement.

'Are they hostile to us, Eric?'

'I don't know. Sit down, my dear,' he said uneasily.

Patricia saw a sea of sinister yellow faces . . . slanting eyes that gleamed wickedly . . . guttural voices chattered about the car.

Then suddenly the terrible, unbelievable happened.

A shot rang out. Sir Eric Hughes, with a choking cry, toppled forward on to the floor of the car. The driver pulled up sharply. Patricia gained her feet and stood swaying, staring with eyes of horror down at the prostrate man.

The first blood had been shed in Canhung. It was the beginning of an open hostility which had been smouldering in the heart of China for centuries.

Yellow men sprang on to the footboard of the car. There were hoarse shouts . . . shrill cries . . . and Patricia found herself surrounded by Chinese. Not a white face in sight . . . not a friendly hand offered to help her. As white as her dress she stood there, frozen with terror; aghast, and Eric Hughes crumpled up at her feet, the blood pouring from a wound in his neck.

A skinny yellow hand touched her. She lost her nerve then and screamed.

'Help! Help! Help!'

The next moment a hand was placed across her mouth. A pair of powerful arms lifted her right out of the car. She was jostled and dragged through an evil-smelling, revolting crowd of strikers. In vain she kicked and struggled. She was carried through a doorway. The door closed, shutting out the sunlight and the sound of car sirens as European policemen drove to the deserted car wherein the body of the Inspector-General of Customs at Shang Tao lay bleeding and unconscious.

Patricia Moreland was as lost to the world, once she was taken through that secret door, as though she, too, had died; she was lost in the maze and labyrinth of native quarters in Canhung.

She lost consciousness.

When she opened her eyes she found herself in a small, stuffy room which smelt strongly of incense; of burning pastilles. She lay on a couch which was spread with cushions.

The instant she returned to sensibility she realised the ghastly fate that had overtaken her. Eric Hughes had been assassinated and she had been carried off by yellow men. She sat up, uttering a shrill scream. Immediately some curtains of thick silken material parted and a Chinaman came into the room.

He stood before Patricia's couch, hands in the wide sleeves of his black jacket, and bowed low to her.

'You called?' he said.

She stared at him, wild with terror. She did not remember having seen him at Garvin Stewart's side at the Imperial Hotel. All Chinamen looked alike to her. This one was rather fat, and he spoke very good English. She seized upon this with hope.

'Please, let me out—at once,' she panted. 'I—I was with Sir Eric Hughes. I wish to be taken to the Consulate at once.'

Chai Yin smiled.

'It's impossible,' he said.

Patricia gained her feet. Her hat was off. Her hair was disordered. She felt sick and faint, but she tried to speak with dignity.

'I don't know who you are, but I demand that you let me out of this place immediately.'

'Any demand but that I will grant you, gracious lady,' said Chai Yin. 'May I introduce myself? Mr. Chai, at your service. I was educated in your brilliant country, both at Eton and Oxford University.'

Patricia stared at him. Somehow it sounded ludicrous to her to hear this fat yellow man, in his native garb, announcing that he had had a first-class English education.

'If that is so, Mr.—Chai -you will behave like an English public school man,' she said, breathing fast. 'You will return me to my people.'

'I regret,' he said, spreading out his hands. 'It is impossible.'

She looked at his hands. The long pointed nails in gold

cases made her feel physically sick. She began to shudder from head to foot.

'What do you intend to do with me?' she said.

Chai Yin's eyes narrowed. Suddenly he came close to her, seized one of her hands, and began to stroke it.

'I intend to take you with me on a long journey, White Jade,' he said.

'My name is Miss Moreland and I live in Shang Tao,' she said, gritting her teeth. 'How dare you——'

'Your name is no longer Miss Moreland,' he interrupted. 'It is White Jade. You belong to Chai Yin now.'

'Let me go,' she panted.

'Never. You are so beautiful,' he said in a dreamy voice. 'In Shang Tao I saw you, O White Jade, and sent my servant, Ming Ho, to follow your divine footsteps. It is he who brought you to me out of that rabble in the streets.'

Patricia's tongue was cleaving to the roof of her mouth.

'Let me go,' she repeated hoarsely.

'Listen, White Jade,' said Chai Yin, with a smile. 'It is necessary that I leave Canhung to-night at moonrise and set out for the city of Kara-Ning, which lies across the Nobi Desert under the shadow of Ki-Shan Mountains. It is written that you, O my White Jade, shall accompany me on that journey.'

Patricia could not answer. Sick with terror, she tried to draw away from him. That such a thing could have happened ... Eric's assassination in the open streets of Canhung ... her abduction by a scheming yellow man ... oh, God, it was not true. One read of such things ... but it could not be true ... could not have happened to *her*!

'It is written, O White Jade, that you shall love Chai Yin,' said the merchant softly.

'No, no, no,' she said, and fell on her knees now, clutching at his embroidered coat. 'Let me go ... Mr. Chai Yin, for the love of God let me go!'

His black, slanting eyes gleamed amorously at her.

'You shall have time to think—to prepare,' he said. 'I do not like to take an unwilling maiden. But in time you will be willing and soft-eyed with love for me, O my White Jade.'

Patricia's teeth chattered.

'Let me go . . . oh, please, please!'

'To-night at moonrise you go with me on our journey. I am called to Kara-Ning to worship the gods of my honourable ancestors,' he said. His thin yellow hand rested a moment on her golden head. 'It will take us three weeks to reach Kara-Ning, O White Jade, and I shall give you that period of time to make your preparations . . . to resign yourself to your glorious bridal . . . with me . . .'

'God, help me,' said Patricia piteously, and crumpled up at his feet. She had fainted again.

Chai Yin stooped down, picked her up, and laid her on the couch. He stooped as though to touch her face with his, then desisted and drew back.

'In the fullness of time, White Jade,' he said. 'The fruit is lovelier for ripening. I would rather that it fell into my lap than that it was plucked for me.'

He walked to a little gong, which stood on an ebon pedestal in one corner of the room, and struck it three times. It boomed—a muffled, mysterious sound—through the house. The curtains parted. Ming Ho stood there, grinning.

'Fetch whichever serving woman is to be trusted in this house,' said Chai Yin. 'Bid her bring native costume for White Jade and prepare her for our journey. Then go, fetch my car, and at moonrise we start for Kara-Ning. What news, Ming Ho?'

'A great disturbance at the Consulate,' said Ming Ho, curling his lips back from his broken teeth. 'The crowd has been scattered by soldiers and the white people show anxiety So far, none remember that the Inspector was accompanied by the white lady, so no search is being made for her.'

'Excellent,' said Chai Yin. He turned back to the sofa, where Patricia lay, half-conscious, dumb with terror. He smiled—an evil, satisfied smile.

From some other part of the house came the thin wail of a reed pipe and a voice singing a weird droning song.

Patricia did not fully recover her senses for many hours. She was doped now; like a limp thing in the hands of the

Chinese woman who stripped her of her European clothes and put her into the cotton trousers and baggy coat of a Chinese girl.

When she finally came out of that dazed condition of mind she found herself in a car, being driven rapidly across miles of desolate, uninhabited country a long way out of Canhung. The moon had risen and the night had a certain hot, wild beauty about it. But Patricia found it terrible and terrifying. The huge figure of Chai Yin sat beside her—an implacable gaoler; and she was being driven—she realised it—farther and farther from civilisation and her own people.

She crouched in her corner of the car, a mute, shivering figure in her Chinese suit. Every inch of that drive was a horror. The look in Chai Yin's eyes when he turned them upon her made her sick with fear. It was like a nightmare . . . the whole ghastly thing.

She was to travel across the great Nobi Desert to Kara-Ning. That sounded like another world. Half-mad with fear, she told herself that she was lost . . . lost for ever to her own delightful, happy, secure world.

It was curious how much she thought about Garvin in this night of terror. If he could see her now, surely he would feel that she was having her punishment for any mean, selfish, or unkind deed she had ever committed. She supposed he would hear in time of this outrage. The whole of England would hear of it, read about it. Eventually a search would be made for her. But what chance had a European search-party against the subtle cunning and intrigue of China?

Chai Yin turned his head and looked at the girl.

'Ah,' he said in his smooth English, 'you are awake?'

'Where are you taking me?' she managed to ask. Her lips were dry and pale. Her body was drenched in a sweat of terror.

'To the loveliest temple in all China—the temple of my illustrious forefather's god,' he said. 'The Chais worship the Siberian Tiger God—a religion older than the mountains. The high priest has called me and I go.'

'Why can't you let me go back to my people?'

Chai Yin took one of her hands and stroked it. She

cowered away from him. His sloe-black eyes sparkled wickedly in the moonlight, then he shrugged his shoulders and drew back from her.

'I will not take you to my heart, yet, my White Jade. First you shall grow to love Chai Yin. Look yonder at the rice-fields and the catalpa-trees in the moonshine. Is my country not beautiful?'

She saw the futility of pleading with the yellow man. She looked with blind, hunted eyes at the wild beauty of the passing scenery, and to her it was repulsive and frightening. She closed her eyes, and her lips moved in prayer.

'God ... if I have to die, let me die game, like an Englishwoman ... but don't let this yellow beast touch me.'

They travelled for hours. Patricia learned, afterwards, that this car in which the wealthy merchant journeyed to Kara-Ning was a Citroën-Kegresse—the same make of car that had crossed the Sahara. In this conveyance Patricia Moreland (probably the first white woman ever to do so and survive) crossed the Nobi Desert with Chai Yin.

IV

Days and nights followed of scorching sun; of the fury and discomfort of the *buran*, which is a sand-storm in the desert; the rapid changes of cold and heat; nauseous insects—and, to Patricia, a paralysing sense of horror and desolation, with hundreds of miles of yellow, arid waste about her.

She longed for death. But Chai Yin, ever bland and smiling, impervious to the discomforts of the journey, was at her side to keep her alive. He wanted the beautiful white girl, and he was not going to let her die. With subtle Chinese drugs and lotions he kept the fever down in her, with smiling threats more terrible than any physical cruelty could have been, he forced her to eat and to sleep and so kept the spark of life alive in her. After a fortnight of that dreadful journey she was worn to a shadow, hollow-eyed, despairing. But she was still brave; her spirit was still unbroken

Sometimes, half unconscious, she lay in the car at Chai Yin's side, and, with weary, bloodshot eyes behind the smoked glasses he provided for her, watched the wild geese fly overhead, like great fantastic white shapes under the burning blue of the sky. Sometimes over the undulating wastes of burnt-up sand came wild camel, who after one scared look at the Citroen-Kegresse toiling over the sand, lurched and galloped away in their ungainly fashion. Sometimes wild turkey came and jibbered at Patricia, choking her with yellow dust At nights she knew the horror of bats, winging blindly against her face; of strange, buzzing insects; of a deathly stillness and the sickening, musky aroma which she had learned to associate with the Orient.

Sometimes, as though in a trance, she felt Chai Yin's hand on her hair; heard his thick, dreamy voice telling her of his passion.

'O White Jade, Peerless One . . . the time of our marriage is not afar off. I can hear the bridal drums even now. One golden night of Asia, you and I will be drenched in the dizzying sweetness of our love. O White Jade, you are slimmer than the lily and as white . . . as delicate . . . made for man's desire.'

Now and then Patricia dragged herself into speech and action; tried in a wild fit of despair to escape Chai Yin and fling herself back from the car. But always a steely arm pulled her back and a soft, sinister laugh echoed in her ear.

'No, White Jade, your beauty is for me . . . not for unkind Death. Wait, flower of my soul . . . love will dawn in your soul ere the full moon is here.'

Such speeches filled the girl's soul with fear, and she would close her eyes and think of England . . . of her friend, Sonia Mason, and poor Eric . . . and of Garvin who had loved her . . . all dear, lost ghosts of the past.

On the fifth morning of the third week, within sight of the isolated and centuries-old city of Kara-Ning, which lies under the spur of the great Ki-Shan Mountains, Ming Ho—who had accompanied his master, with two Chinese boys, one of whom drove the car—sighted camels and baggage-ponies some miles to the left of the desert.

Chai Yin looked at the distant party through field-glasses, then shrugged his shoulders.

'Wanderers in the desert and of no importance,' he observed.

Patricia stared ahead of her with tragic eyes. The rugged mountains, at last breaking the monotony of that terrible journey over the flat wastes of the Nobi, seemed to her like dark monsters waiting to devour her. The wanderers in the desert did not interest her.

But it just happened that those wanderers chanced to be Garvin Stewart, Bill Trensham, and their guides. They had set out for the Ki-Shan Mountains before Chai Yin had started, without realising that they might strike a city such as Kara-Ning. Tortured with heat and insects, stiff from riding their lurching camels, they came to the Ki-Shan Mountains, and saw the city under its shadow with relief. But long before

they reached the city walls, Patricia had been driven through the gates and was swallowed up once more in the subtle, secret heart of China.

Despite her fear of the unknown, Patricia knew distinct relief when Chai Yin lifted her out of the car and she found herself in the cool shade of the city It was a real Chinese city, without any trace of Western civilisation. Kara-Ning, with its ancient stone buildings; its pagodas; its exotic flower-filled gardens; its golden pools and fairy-like bridges . . . like a jewel in the arid wastes of the Nobi . . . slumbrous, drowsy; full of strange cries of birds and lutes and the sharp sweet tinkle of temple bells.

Chai Yin seemed to be well known in Kara-Ning. Everywhere he was made welcome ... and slanting eyes stared inquisitively at the pale girl in the blue Chinese suit, who half-walked, half-staggered at his side.

She was taken to the great temple which stood in the centre of the city, a colossal building, centuries old, dwarfing every other building in Kara-Ning. Chai Yin led Patricia through the *pai-lou* or archway, up the avenue to the temple, which had a triple roof underlaid with carved and lacquered woodwork and brilliantly painted glazed tiles.

Up three circular terraces with marble balustrades the Chinaman led the English girl, then through a great carved door into the temple.

Here in a dark, gloomy hall of immense height, with great stone pillars supporting the roof, Patricia was initiated into a mysterious and terrifying world which had no place in the mind of modern man and seemed to her to be an incredible, barbaric relic of primeval days.

She stood beside Chai Yin, staring around her. Out of the shadows came lean shapes . . . out of the darkness sparkled wicked, slanting eyes. The air was surcharged with mystery . . the faint, sickly smell of incense drifted to her nostrils, and there came the low chant of voices.

'The priests are worshipping,' said Chai Yin, with a deep bow. 'Look you, O White Jade, you are honoured in being allowed to enter into this most illustrious temple of the Siberian Tiger God.'

She did not feel honoured. Her great blue eyes were full of nameless fear—pathetically large in her small pale face, which had shrunk since her capture by Chai Yin. She felt that some ghastly fate must sooner or later overtake her.

'Behold,' said Chai Yin, 'my illustrious and honourable friend, Nyi Hung the high priest, is here.'

Great swinging curtains of thick red silk parted, and a man came toward Chai Yin, followed by a retinue. This man looked to Patricia a repulsive and terrifying spectacle. He was of tremendous height and of a skeleton thinness. His head was shaven. He was a Bonze—half Manchu, half Tartar—and he wore a blue robe embroidered with the Schwee Dragon. His face was like a cracked yellow mask, hideously painted. Behind him came rows of priests; all shaven; all revolting, in blue robes and wearing rope-soled sandals which made no sound on the stone floor. Somehow the stealthy *pad, pad* of their feet made Patricia's tongue cleave to the roof of her mouth.

Nyi Hung approached her with great dignity and stood staring at her. Then he turned to Chai Yin, and the two men spoke rapidly in Chinese.

Patricia did not understand what passed between them, but after a moment Chai Yin turned to her and said:

'Nyi Hung welcomes the White Jade as my honourable guest. Behold the daughter of Nyi Hung, the most illustrious and beautiful Jewel of Asia—Silk Moth—comes to welcome you.'

Patricia saw a Chinese girl emerge from the shadows behind one of the great pillars. The Silk Moth. Yes, like a gorgeous and wicked little moth she looked . . . very tiny and golden-skinned, with velvet-black eyes under moth-wing brows; a scarlet painted mouth and oiled black hair full of jewelled stick-pins. She wore a green brocaded coat and wide green trousers. Her tiny lemon-coloured hands were gay with rings. She was exquisite . . . a creature of rainbow tints . . . yet wicked . . . evil and envy dwelt in the eyes of the Silk Moth—daughter of the high priest.

Chai Yin greeted the Silk Moth reverently. The High Priest spoke to her, indicating Patricia. The Silk Moth

replied. Chai Yin said:

'She bids you welcome. Go with her, White Jade.'

Patricia, like one in a dream, followed the tiny exquisite figure of the Silk Moth and found herself in a room full of priceless lacquer and great exotic flowers which gave out a sweet, cloying perfume. It was the private resting-room of the high priest's daughter. Here a slave-girl brought tea to Patricia. She drank it thirstily. She was then given rice-cakes and flour-balls cooked in sugar. While she ate, the Silk Moth who stood before Pat, watching her, spoke to her slave-girl. It was as well poor Patricia did not understand.

'The White Jade is a revolting creature, Lueylia, and she shall not remain in my father's temple. She shall be put to the sacrifice.'

Lueylia, a slim, dusky, Dyak girl, imported for the Silk Moth's pleasure, from Malaya, bowed reverently to her mistress. But there was a kindlier look in her velvet brown eyes as she watched Patricia eat her food than lay in the eyes of the Silk Moth.

Outside—in the great pillared hall—Nyi Hung and Chai Yin stood conversing. It was a very sinister conversation, not pleasing to Chai Yin. He listened to what the great high priest had to say, his yellow face blander than ever.

'It is decreed, Chai Yin,' said Nyi Hung softly, 'that the White Jade shall be sacrificed to the Tiger God.'

'I had intended her for the red bridal chair,' said Chai Yin, folding his hands in his sleeve.

'Nay . . . it is written that the white virgin be sacrificed to appease the wrath of the Tiger God, who is restless and dissatisfied with us,' said Nyi Hung. 'The great god demands . . . nothing save the body of a pure white virgin will satisfy his hunger. You have done well, Chai Yin, to bring this White Jade for sacrifice, and the god will reward you.'

Chai Yin was distressed. He had wanted the White Jade for his own feasting. But if Nyi Hung spoke . . . he must be obeyed. Purely philosophic and superstitious, like all Chinese, Chai Yin bowed to the inevitable.

'The White Jade shall be sacrificed, O Nyi Hung,' he said.

Nyi Hung's beady eyes glistened. The sacrifice of a white

virgin . . . ah, that would satisfy the people of Kara-Ning, and the glory of the temple would be greatly enhanced. He turned to a great bronze gong and struck it sharply three times. In answer two priests emerged from the shadows.

'Go to the illustrious Silk Moth, my daughter, and tell her that the White Jade will be sacrificed on the high altar two dawns from now,' said Nyi Hung. 'Bind the White Jade and place her in the cell of sacrifice under the temple.'

Chai Yin licked his lips gently. He was disappointed. But what the gods had decreed, he, Chai Yin, must not oppose, lest the wrath of the Siberian Tiger fall upon him and his illustrious family.

There was a sudden commotion outside the temple gates. Chai Yin and Nyi Hung looked. They saw two white men, with tattered shirts and disordered hair, swaying in the centre of a hostile mob of yellow men.

The high priest moved out to the circular terrace.

'Who are these strangers, coming to Kara-Ning?' he muttered.

'Death ... death to the white dogs,' cried the seething crowd.

Then Chai Yin saw the handsome, boyish face of one of the men who fought fiercely against the crowd, and he gave a cry.

'It is Garvin Stewart—my English friend.'

'Your friend, O Chai Yin?' said Nyi Hung.

'Yes. He wears the symbol of Mazdaism,' said Chai Yin eagerly. 'He must not be harmed.'

Nyi Hung raised a hand.

'Let the white men be brought unharmed to the temple,' he said in a sonorous voice.

Five minutes later, gasping, sweating, more dead than alive after their rough handling, Garvin and Bill found themselves in the mysterious gloom of the great temple. When Garvin saw the familiar face of Chai Yin, he gave a great sigh of relief.

'Thank the lord it's you, Mr. Chai,' he said. 'My friend, Mr. Trensham and I have been prospecting for minerals in the desert, and we came across this city by mistake.

Apparently your people here don't care much for us.'

'I regret that you have received so unkind a welcome, Mr. Stewart,' said Chai Yin courteously. 'But Nyi Hung, high priest of the worship of the Siberian Tiger God, gives you shelter and hospitality here.'

'Lummy,' muttered Bill in Garvin's ear, 'what barbarous religion have we struck here?'

'Shut up, you fool, and leave things to me. We've got to be pretty sweet and friendly if we want to get out of this place alive,' whispered Garvin, who knew his China.

Suddenly the wailing cry of a girl broke the deep, musky stillness of the temple precincts. Garvin started and looked round.

'What was that?' he said.

'It was nothing,' said the high priest in his oily voice.

'By God, it was the cry of an Englishwoman ... not of a Chinese,' said Garvin Stewart between his teeth. 'I heard it distinctly ... she said, "Help, oh, help!"'

Chai Yin's eyes narrowed to slits.

'My illustrious friend Mr. Stewart will be advised to make no adverse comments on anything he might hear within these walls,' he said smoothly.

Garvin recovered himself.

'I am entirely at your service, Mr. Chai,' he replied.

But that moaning cry haunted him.

It had been the voice of Patricia Moreland as she was seized and taken down to the cells of sacrifice by Nyi Hung's priests. And what Garvin had not heard was the mocking, cruel laughter of the Silk Moth as she watched the White Jade's agony.

Garvin and Bill feasted that night with Nyi Hung and Mr. Chai Yin from Shang Tao, who in ceremonious manner entertained his English friends. But Garvin was uneasy in the great banqueting hall of the temple, and Bill declared it gave him 'the positive creeps' to eat his food surrounded by great grinning gods in an atmosphere thick with incense.

The Silk Moth feasted with them. From the time her wicked, slanting eyes fell upon Garvin, who was the most handsome man she had ever imagined and who spoke to her

so cleverly in her native tongue, she conceived one of her wild, barbaric passions for him.

Before the night had ended she was at his side, her tiny hand caressing his thick brown hair. Nyi Hung, used to gratifying any whim of his daughter's, looked on without emotion. And finally the Silk Moth was left alone with Garvin and Bill. Garvin, realising that the little creature had fallen in love with him, used all his wits to drag from her the secret of that English cry which he had heard earlier in the day.

The Silk Moth, her tongue loosened by much hot *samshu*, wreathed creamy, jewelled arms about the Englishman's knees and answered his questions without restraint.

'A white girl in the temple? Yes, most illustrious Lord ... the White Jade, she is called. She has insipid hair of gold and a pallid face ... bah, I do not like her! But she is for the sacrifice, and you shall see it, two dawns from now.'

Garvin shot a rapid look at Bill. The muscles of his face worked. By God, he had been right ... there *was* a white girl in the temple. The White Jade, they called her.

'Heaven knows who the unfortunate creature is, but we shall have to do something about this, Bill,' Garvin muttered.

Silk Moth looked up at Garvin.

'Do I find favour in the sight of my lord?' she said in a seductive voice.

Garvin thought he knew when to be tactful. He seized the little painted, wicked creature up in his arms and kissed her. It was the first Western embrace Silk Moth had ever received, and she was enchanted with it. She clung to him, cooing and giggling. But while Garvin caressed her, his eyes looked over her jewelled stick-pins at Bill ... eyes full of horror.

'Two dawns from now, Bill,' he said. 'A white girl with golden hair ... to be sacrificed by these yellow brutes ... whoever she is, we must try and save her.'

'God knows how,' said Bill Trensham. 'I like an adventure, Garvin, but I'm half wishing my little self at the club in Shang Tao at this moment.'

'Buck up,' said Garvin. 'We'll pull through.'

Mechanically he went on kissing and caressing the silken, scented body of the Chinese girl in his arms.

V

One dawn passed.

Two hours before the second dawn Garvin and Bill, who had, up till then, been treated with all the Chinese courtesy appropriate to the occasion, were taken before the high priest, Nyi Hung. On one side of him stood Chai Yin, in gorgeous ceremonial robes, on the other the Silk Moth, in amethyst, gold-embroidered satin trousers and coat.

The high priest looked at Garvin.

'O White Man,' he said. 'I have been conversing with my illustrious friend, Chai Yin, on the subject of your good-will to China, and it is decreed that before we release you from the temple and send you back across the desert whence you came you give us proof of your friendship.'

'In what way, O noble and honourable father, can I prove that friendship?' inquired Garvin in Chinese.

'At dawn,' said Nyi Hung, 'a girl of your colour, known as the White Jade, will be sacrificed to the Tiger God. It is written that no blood shall be spilled nor marks of violence rest on that unblemished virgin body; but that she shall be put to sleep for ever, then placed in the great Jade Tomb outside the walls of Kara-Ning.'

'Yes,' said Garvin, his heart racing, his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides.

'It is written,' said Nyi Hung softly, 'that a white man shall administer the death-draught. Thus shall you prove your friendship and your respect to our gods.'

'No, by God—' began Bill Trensham, his fair face crimson with disgust.

'Shut up, you fool,' said Garvin. Aloud he said in Chinese to Nyi Hung:

'It shall be carried out. My hand shall administer death to

this White Jade. Mr. Chai Yin knows that I am a man of medicine . . . in my own country I studied doctoring. In the bag on my baggage-pony outside he magic draughts, which deal swift and silent death. Have this bag brought to me, and I will see that the White Jade goes unblemished to her tomb.'

Bill stared at his friend. And now Garvin's meaning struck him. Morphia pellets . . . and not enough morphia to kill this white girl, whoever she was, poor little devil!

'It is well,' said Nyi Hung, raising a hand. 'The Tiger God will reward you, O White Man.'

Ming Ho, servant to Chai Yin, cast an evil suspicious look at the white man he hated. He did not trust Garvin Stewart, and he was going to watch.

Dawn broke over Kara-Ning, a beautiful dawn, flushing the Eastern sky with rose and gold. Peaceful . . heavenly, innocent. But in the cells under the gigantic temple a helpless girl, half-mad with horror, waited death at the hands of fanatic yellow priests.

When Garvin Stewart, his morphia tablets in the pocket of his khaki drill coat, entered the Sacred Interior of the temple, where a thousand yellow men and women with greedy lascivious faces awaited the human sacrifice to the Tiger God, he felt cold with apprehension. The air was thick with the smoke of incense. The chanting of priests drowned all other sounds. Rows of blue-clad, shaven Bonzes walked down the centre aisle; Nyi Hung, in magnificent, jewelled vestments, leading them.

Then, as the atmosphere grew clearer, Garvin saw the high altar, and, stretched on a flat marble slab, the white, naked body of a girl.

'Oh, my God!' he said, gripping the arm of Bill Trensham. 'Look at that——'

Bill looked and felt sick. He could not tell what manner of woman it was, but the body of the white girl, glistening with perfumed oils, was slender and beautiful; strapped with golden bands to the altar.

Nyi Hung turned to the kneeling crowd

'Behold the White Jade; a pure virgin of ivory to be sacrificed to the almighty Tiger God,' he chanted. 'Behold a

white lord himself shall give to her the potion of death. It is written that no blood shall be spilled; neither marks of violence left upon her. O White Lord, come hither.'

Garvin gave Bill a quick look.

'Wait for me outside the temple door, Bill. After the sacrifice we will get away and rescue the girl from the tomb. They never seal down any tomb until twenty-four hours after death. The poor little creature! God, it makes my blood boil.'

'Good luck, Garvin,' whispered Bill.

Garvin was led by two Bonzes up to the high altar. For a moment he was dazed by the immensity of the background. Two white velvet curtains, twenty-four feet in length, swung back, just behind the sacrificial slab, revealing the Tiger God, before whom all the Bonzes fell flat on their faces. To Garvin it was just a monstrous image of white and gold; a misshapen, distorted tiger of colossal size, with a hungry yawning mouth out of which dripped a slow stream of bubbling froth, resembling saliva. It was obscene; terrifying.

Garvin shuddered, and looked down at the white girl whom he meant to save if he could. And then for the first time he saw her face. For an instant in petrified silence he stared at her, and the blood in his veins seemed turned to ice. It was Patricia Moreland who lay naked, agonised, bound to that altar before that frightful idol. Her face was livid; her great blue eyes stared, half-mad with terror, up at the ceiling Her golden hair, wet with some sort of sticky scent they had used, clung damply to her head.

Garvin could not believe his eyes. Then a cry broke from him, of horror—of fear.

'Pat ... you ... great heavens!'

She turned to him. The unexpected sight of Garvin Stewart, after all the horrors through which she had passed, proved too much for her. She just said:

'Kill me ... quickly ...' then fainted.

Garvin shuddered from head to foot.

How came Patricia, whom he had last seen in Shang Tao with Eric Hughes, to be in Kara-Nirg, across the Nobi Desert? He could not begin to think. But when he looked up

and saw the tall sinister form of Nyi Hung, the high priest, and beside him Chai Yin, he wondered dimly if Chai Yin was responsible for this outrage.

A great gong boomed through the temple. The Bonzes began to chant. Above the chanting rose the voice of Nyi Hung.

'A sacrifice ... a sacrifice ... death to the White Jade.'

Patricia opened her eyes.

Garvin leaned down, and with a shaking hand slipped three tablets between her lips and said:

'Swallow these ... they will bring you sleep.'

But aloud, as though in a sudden frenzy of joy, he raised his hands above his head and said in Chinese:

'She dies . . she dies ... O mighty Siberian Tiger God, accept my sacrifice!'

A mighty roar from the kneeling crowd echoed through the building. Pat heard it like the crash of doom just before she drifted into unconsciousness again.

Garvin thought:

'Oh, God, if only I could cover her body from those devils' eyes ... the shame, the horror of it!'

Clouds of incense rose round the sacrificial slab, veiling the piteous white body of the girl. Nyi Hung bade his priests unstrap her and place her in a litter, covered with flowers. She was then carried out of the temple, followed by the crowd.

Ming Ho plucked at the sleeve of his master

'I think the White Jade lives, O illustrious master,' he whispered, with an evil grin. 'Shall we not follow to the Jade Tomb and make sure?'

Chai Yin gave Ming Ho an inscrutable look. But his amorous Chinese heart leaped with sudden desire. If that were true ... if the white man had fooled the gods, should not he, Chai Yin, benefit by the treachery?

Half an hour later, livid with horror, drenched in sweat, Garvin and Bill were released from the temple.

'Pat,' said Garvin hoarsely. 'Pat Moreland ... my God, I could murder the swine! Chai Yin must be responsible for

this, Bill. He must have abducted her and brought her here.'

'Shall we ever get her out of Kara-Ning alive?'

'We must,' said Garvin. 'I feel almost as though this were fate, Bill . . . that the woman who played fast and loose with me should be delivered like this into my hands. I shall not leave Kara-Ning without her. Listen. As soon as darkness falls, we will get hold of our guides and our camels: tell them to wait outside the walls, and then we will go to the Jade Tomb. There is enough morphia in Pat to keep her unconscious for hours. I told Nyi Hung that the drug acted slowly, but that she would be dead by moonrise. He was satisfied. He said some tommy rot about a slow death being more acceptable to his god.'

'Where is that yellow friend of yours, with his sweet-faced servant, Ming Ho?'

'I don't know. Chai Yin disappeared immediately after Pat's body was carried out of the temple. By God, he'll have to account for this when we get back to Shang Tao.'

'If ever we do,' said Bill gloomily.

When darkness fell the Englishmen, unnoticed, left the temple, walked through the *pai-lou* and along the narrow, cobbled streets of Kara-Ning to the great stone wall outside which stood a tomb built of pure Chinese jade and dedicated to the victims of religious sacrifice.

The tomb had been visited by thousands during the afternoon, all eager to see the body of the White Jade whom the Siberian Tiger God had taken for his own. Now it was deserted; sinister, wrapped in silence and darkness. It was the hour before moonrise. The hot Chinese night was drenched with the sweetness from blossoms in the bean-fields fringing the Ki-Shan Mountains.

Garvin pushed open the door leading into the sepulchre. A sweet, sickly odour of incense greeted his nostrils. Eagerly he went forward to the open coffin, made of cedar-wood, in which he knew Patricia had been placed; her body covered with flowers. Then his heart gave a sick jerk. He swung round to Trensham, who was on guard outside the tomb.

'My God, man, we're too late!' he said. 'The devils have got her! She's gone!'

VI

Two hours before Garvin and Bill stole to the Jade Tomb outside Kara-Ning, Patricia Moreland had opened her eyes, only to pass from one horror to another; to waken from the kindly oblivion of the morphia to hideous consciousness.

At first she could see nothing . . . feel nothing . . . she was too drugged and drowsy. Then she became aware that she was lying on her back in a narrow box, softly cushioned, not uncomfortable. She stirred, and a shower of flower-petals were scattered by her movement. Groping with her hands, she came in contact with a mass of flowers covering her body. Gradually she grew accustomed to the dusk. A single light, in a green Chinese lantern which swung from the ceiling, cast a pallid glow about her and revealed an octagonal chamber which was built of jade. It had no window, but was of terrific height, sloping up in the centre toward a point which was not distinguishable to the girl. The atmosphere of this chamber was hot, sickly sweet with flowers and the incense which curled up from silver urns on either side of her strange bed.

For a long while Patricia lay motionless, staring about her and feeling sick and faint. Then her brain cleared . . . leaped back to the ghastly remembrance of the thing that had taken place . . . When was it? . . . It seemed centuries ago, in that temple of the Tiger God. She remembered her shame, her horror when the priests had stripped and bound her to the slab of sacrifice, her terror as she had lain there, awaiting death at the hands of the yellow fiends. This green, dim chamber was a tomb . . . oh, God . . . and this box wherein she lay *was a coffin.* She had been buried . . . buried alive.

Patricia tried to shriek . . . but her voice failed her . . . she was too weak, too ill from the effects of the drug. Only a

gasping moan escaped her dry lips. At the same time she remembered Garvin . . . Garvin's face as he had bent over her in the temple and slipped the pellets between her lips.

'Garvin . . . Garvin,' she moaned, shuddering from head to foot. 'Garvin . . . come . . . save me . . . oh, my God, I shall go mad!'

Where was he? How had he come to be in that barbaric temple? Had they slaughtered him? She supposed they had; that she need not cry for Garvin . . . it was futile. She was interred in this terrifying sepulchre . . . here she would meet death perhaps in a few short hours.

She tried to move, but could only feebly raise an arm. A few crushed, heavily scented flowers brushed her mouth and she sobbed aloud with terror, just at the touch of the soft blossoms against her face. She was strung up to a high pitch of nerves and terror.

'Garvin . . . Garvin!' Again she called the name of the Englishman whose brown, familiar face, leaning over her, had been the last thing of which she had been conscious before Morpheus had gathered her into a close embrace. She forgot all the bitterness, the regrets of past years—of her unkindness to him and his reproaches to her. She remembered only that once they had been lovers. Surely, surely, Garvin was not against her, siding with those yellow devils? Surely, if he lived, he would rescue her.

Her dilated eyes concentrated on a door with a great curved silver handle, immediately in front of her. The handle was turning. She began to pant quickly with excitement and terror of the unknown. Who was this? God in heaven, have mercy! . . . who was it, creeping so silently into this ghastly tomb?

Then she saw the fat, yellow face of Chai Yin, the merchant from Shang Tao; a hideously familiar face. Any hope she might have entertained that it was Garvin, Garvin come to save her, died an agonising death. Chai Yin, followed by Ming Ho, crept like a thief into that scented chamber and stood beside her. His eyes glittered as he looked down and saw that she was conscious.

'Ah, White Jade . . . you are spared for me,' he whispered.

'Come ... you are too young and beautiful to die in this unkind sepulchre I am renouncing my religion and braving the wrath of the gods .. for you, Golden Lily'

She stared up at him, gasping for breath.

'Chai Yin ... have mercy .. take me to my own people.'

But Chai Yin turned to Ming Ho.

'The White Jade's clothes—quickly,' he whispered. 'Hasten, you ... there is no time to lose'

Patricia, drowning again in the black swirl of insensibility, tried to fight against him. She felt him draw the cotton coat over her shoulders . . she was lifted into his arms out of the coffin. But it seemed to her that she was being saved from death for a much worse fate. She gave a pitiful sob

'Garvin ... Garvin!'

And after that, merciful oblivion.

It was some time later when Garvin and Bill discovered that Patricia's body had gone. Garvin guessed at once that Chai Yin was responsible for the theft. Mr Chai had Western knowledge ... must have realised that Garvin had not given Pat sufficient morphia to kill her He had taken her.

'God, Bill,' Garvin said hoarsely 'What can we do . . how can we begin to find her?'

'Yes, how?' echoed Bill, his healthy face white in the moonlight.

A slim, rainbow-tinted figure emerged from the shadows behind the Englishmen They swung round to face the Silk Moth. The high priest's daughter was like a beautiful, wicked night-moth in her black satin coat and trousers, embroidered with silver. The jewelled stick-pins in her stiff black hair flashed with every movement. She ran straight up to Garvin, and held out her tiny lemon-coloured hands with a coo of delight.

'White Lord, the Silk Moth feared you had gone from her for ever.'

Garvin's brain worked swiftly. He lifted the Silk Moth off her tiny feet and swung her up into his arms.

'The White Lord wanted to see the Silk Moth; peerless flower of China,' he said in smooth Chinese. 'I was

interested, little orange-flower, in the sacrifice of the foolish white woman who had not one tenth of your beauty. Where now has her unworthy body been taken?'

Trensham stood by, mute, listening intently. The Chinese girl, flattered by the Englishman, stroked his face for a moment in silence. Then her red lips twisted into a smile of disdain.

'Silk Moth knows many secrets and has many spies,' she said.

'Will the Silk Moth not tell me her secrets?' murmured Garvin, caressing her. But his lips were dry and his handsome face like a mask. This scented, butterfly thing in his arms nauseated him. He felt that she was evil.

'For an English kiss I might tell a secret,' he heard her giggle against his breast. 'It is most pleasant, O illustrious White Lord, the Western embrace.'

'Oh, God, go on—kiss her, man,' said Bill, standing by in an agony of impatience. He was thinking of Patricia Moreland . . . a white girl (it might have been his own sister), in the hands of Chinamen.

Garvin kissed the eager mouth of the little Chinese girl. She clung to him with obvious passion. After five or ten minutes of this philandering, crazy with impatience, Garvin got what he wanted. The high priest's daughter had sent her Dyak girl, Lueylia, to spy by the Jade Tomb, and had seen Chai Yin take the body of the White Jade from its resting-place and, with Ming Ho, his servant, depart into the desert two hours ago.

'It was sacrilege to remove the body that was sacrificed to the great Tiger God,' the Silk Moth finished, shuddering a little in the Englishman's arms. 'And when my father finds out he will curse Chai Yin and his descendants. But I have kept silence because the body of the White Jade is obnoxious to me, and I would prefer she were flung to the jackals in the desert, who might eat her flesh and gnaw her bones, than remain in the sacred tomb.'

'Pleasant little creature,' muttered Bill Trensham.

'So that's the truth,' said Garvin between his teeth. 'It's Chai Yin . . . and he's gone.'

'What can we do now?' asked Bill.

'Listen—I have a plan,' said Garvin rapidly 'Get the Tartar guides who are waiting for us, with our camels and baggage-ponies, bring them back here, and within half an hour I will join you and we must follow Pat. First I must appease this little devil and get rid of her. She wants me to go back to the temple with her. I shall tell her to go first and prepare the way for me . . . then I'll break loose and join you Hurry, Bill. It's a matter of life or death to Pat. God knows what is happening to her.'

Bill saluted his leader gravely, and, turning, marched away in the direction of a café in the town where their guides and animals waited for them.

Garvin Stewart, carrying the Silk Moth in his arms, made love in the prettiest possible Chinese to that wicked little creature, who—completely intoxicated with the white man—allowed herself to be fooled by him

Half an hour later she was in the temple, being arrayed and anointed by the Dyak girl But Garvin was not, as he had promised, waiting outside her window for her signal He was riding through the sinister gates of Kara-Ning, on his swaying, lurching camel, his face set toward the desert, body and brain on fire with the desire to save Patricia from Chai Yin.

VII

Patricia, once more in the Citroën-Kegresse, returned from the fumes and oblivion of the morphia which Garvin had given her to find herself sitting beside Chai Yin.

It took her some time to return to full consciousness, and when she finally opened her eyes and saw the sinister, yellow face of the Shang Tao merchant, who was now in European clothes (and somehow all the more sinister for that), she gave a shuddering sob.

'Oh, God ... God help me ... Garvin, where are you?'

The Chinaman turned to her. 'Ah, my White Jade—you have returned from the shadows!'

She tried to speak, but could not. She felt deathly sick. Shivering and moaning, she leaned back in the car, which was being driven swiftly over the sands, silvered by the moon. The desert was ghostly; fearsome in that white, naked light. Sometimes they passed weird bushes with long sword-like leaves swaying in the night-wind. Sometimes they passed a heap of bones, blanched and hideous ... the carcass of some animal; the skull of a human being. Patricia remained in a kind of stupor—too ill from the effects of the drug to take much interest in her surroundings. She only knew that Chai Yin was taking her away from Kara-Ning, back to civilisation, perhaps. And therein lay a forlorn hope that she might yet see her old friends and awake from this ghastly nightmare.

Where was Garvin? What had happened to him? Would he follow her? Or was he dead?

Chai Yin leaned near her; put an arm about her shoulders. With a moan, she tried to shrink from him, but his skinny hands, with their long, pointed nails, held her fast.

'Nay, White Jade, I have risked the wrath of the gods by

stealing you from your tomb ... I am not going to be repulsed. You are going to repay me with love, Peerless One. Ere another moon rises, we shall celebrate our bridal.'

'No, no,' she said.

'Yes, Golden Flower. You do not perhaps realise that I have stolen you from the great Tiger God himself, out of the sacred tomb, because I consider one moment of passion with you worth an eternity of punishment hereafter.'

'Garvin!' she said, with a piteous sob.

'Garvin Stewart?' Chai Yin stiffened and his lips curled back from his teeth. 'That fool Englishman who thought to hoodwink us by giving you a dose that was not fatal! Bah! . . he will never see you again. If he escapes from Kara-Ning alive and returns to Shang Tao, it will be to swift and sudden death. Ming Ho is right. He is a traitor.'

Patricia's teeth chattered. She began to beat back the fat, horrible yellow face above her.

'Let me go—let me go—don't touch me——'

His fingers twined in her golden hair.

'Softer than silk,' he muttered, his narrow black eyes glittering with unholy fire. 'O White Jade, how beautiful you are! Chai Yin and his household shall be for ever cursed by this sacrilege ... but it is worth while . . for love of you!'

His face came closer to hers. She screamed and beat him back.

'Garvin ... Garvin!' she sobbed.

'Little fool—the Englishman will not hear you. Lie still. Ere another moon has risen you will acknowledge me your master,' he said.

Suddenly the car stopped. Chai Yin muttered an oath in Chinese and shot a rapid question at Ming Ho, who descended and kow-towed.

'Li Ping says trouble with engine, O most illustrious Master,' he said, and looked at Pat with a hideous grin. 'Must wait a few hours for engine get cooler.'

Chai Yin swore again. He had wanted to go full steam ahead ... in case ... in case he was followed. For he feared the wrath of Nyi Hung and his priests more than pursuit from the two Englishmen.

'Can you not proceed?' he snapped.

'It is impossible, O noble Master.'

'Then we must wait awhile,' said Chai Yin, shrugging his shoulders. 'Let Li Ping put right the trouble quickly, lest he lose his unworthy head.'

Li Ping fell flat on his face in the sand, protesting that he was not to blame. Chai Yin cursed him. And while this altercation was taking place, Patricia looked around her with hunted eyes, wondered how she could possibly kill herself before this yellow devil laid hands on her again.

Then suddenly Chai Yin's face became a mask of wrath. He hissed Chinese at Ming Ho, and pointed over the car in the direction from which they had just come. Patricia, feeling languid and ill, also looked. And then her heart leaped and the colour darted to her white face. For she saw what he had seen ... shapes ... small dark blots as yet on the horizon, moving nearer and nearer them.

Chai Yin raised his field-glasses to his eyes. He then turned to Patricia with a savage laugh.

'Your Englishmen, White Jade. You shall see how they will die.'

He whipped a revolver from his pocket and stood on the footboard of the Citroën-Kegresse, waiting for the enemy.

Patricia's heart palpitated wildly.

'Garvin ... oh, thank God ... Garvin,' she muttered.

But in the same breath she prayed that Garvin and the fair-haired Englishman with him would be able to defeat this smiling, Chinese devil who so calmly awaited their approach, a loaded revolver in his hand

VIII

Chai Yin had covered just twenty miles from Kara-Ning when Garvin and Bill Irensham, riding on fast camels, overtook them. But it was not destined to be a single-handed fight between these men who wanted Patricia. It so happened that a third party overtook the other two in that vast, moonlit desert, twenty miles out of Kara-Ning. They were a band of fierce, savage desert-men who dwelt some distance away on a tributary of the Tsi-Fu River, which watered Kara-Ning. These men, of mixed blood, with more Tartar than Manchu in their veins, lived a wild and lawless life in the Nobi Desert and were never seen in the city of Kara-Ning. But they were feared by the inhabitants of that city. Many a lonely traveller who had got into the hands of Wing Ko, the leader of the tribe, had never returned to his people. Occasionally a party of yellow tourists, straying too close to Wing Ko's camp, were wiped off the face of the earth; robbed and murdered, and their mutilated bodies had been long afterwards found and their horrible fate visualised.

Wing Ko—a fierce and lawless Chinaman, with few brains, but a great deal of native cunning and superstition—rode chiefly at night, and on this particular night was in search of booty. His followers, who dwelt in junks on the Tsi-Fu River, wanted some excitement and the spoils of a fight.

Now the three parties met at the point where Chai Yin's car had stopped. Almost as soon as Garvin Stewart, with Bill at his side, sprang from their camels, some distance from the car, and, with loaded revolvers, began cautiously to creep toward Chai Yin, Wing Ko and his men, riding small black ponies, galloped with hideous war-cries toward them.

Patricia, crouching in the car, regarded these new Chinamen with stricken eyes and wondered how much more horror her brain would stand. She sent a wailing cry to Garvin.

'Oh, kill me ... Garvin, kill me first——'

'Courage, Pat!' he called back to her. 'Bill and I will save you.'

But Chai Yin and Ming Ho, much more terrified by the sight of Wing Ko and his men, whose reputation they knew, than by Garvin Stewart, thought that their last hour had come. Chai Yin, his yellow face livid, screamed at Garvin:

'Wing Ko shows no mercy to any man. This is death for you, Englishman.'

Garvin, crouching behind his camel, tossed his head back with a laugh.

'We shall see, Chai Yin. Stand in front of Miss Moreland. Let those fiends touch her and I swear I'll blow your brains out.'

Wing Ko and twenty horsemen, with shaven skulls and painted faces, which were like grotesque and frightful masks in the white moonlight, circled the other two parties. They brandished curved scimitars that flashed brilliantly as they rode. Yells and screams—blood-curdling enough—broke the silence of the desert. Bill Trensham gripped Garvin's arm.

'This is the end, old chap. So long.'

'If it is, I'm keeping a shot for Pat,' said Garvin.

'What the hell is Chai Yin doing?' breathed Bill.

Garvin looked, and saw that Chai Yin had thrown away his automatic and was talking and gesticulating to Wing Ko. Garvin, who had studied the various forms of Chinese language, interpreted for Bill.

'By God, the yellow devil is cunning. He's told the desert brigand that I'm wearing the symbol of the Fire God. Wing Ko and his men may be fire worshippers. If they are we're all right. Look, Bill—he's sending for me. If I don't come back, shoot Pat dead, for the Lord's sake.'

Trensham gripped his revolver firmly and moved to Pat's side. The girl had stumbled out of the car and was clinging on

to it, swaying slightly. Her golden head was bare, her face deathly pale.

'You're all right, Miss Moreland,' said Bill. 'If things go wrong, I've got a bullet for you.'

Pat looked at him through bloodshot eyes.

'I can't stand much more,' she said 'Oh, what is going to happen to Garvin?'

'Nothing, I hope. He's making friends with that grinning ape on the pony,' said Bill.

Pat put a hand to her throat and watched Garvin converse with Wing Ko. The frightful uncertainty and excitement of it all seemed to rend her in two. And it struck her forcibly in this moment that, if Garvin were to be suddenly slaughtered by those hideous desert thieves, she would welcome death at his side . . . be glad of Bill Trensham's bullet. All her old love for Garvin seemed to revive; to accumulate into one great passion of longing to find herself back in England . peaceful, lovely, civilised England, with Garvin. her lover—Garvin whom she had loved

She clung to the arm of the tall, fair-haired boy who was Garvin's friend.

'What's happening . . . tell me . . . I can't see very well,' she said piteously. 'All the morphia has made me . . . so sick . . . so blind.'

Bill thought:

'Poor little woman—she's been through hell—one can't be angry with her Even if she did treat old Garvin badly, my lord, she's paid for it.'

Aloud he said:

'I believe Garvin's pulling it over them. Look . . . try to understand.'

Garvin, standing between two tall, painted tribesmen, was speaking proudly to Wing Ko, who sat like a hideous idol on his pony.

'Wing Ko would see the sacred symbol of Mazda?' he said.

'Yes,' said Wing Ko half fearfully. 'Show it to me, White Stranger.'

Garvin, who knew the childish superstition of these people, played up to it for all he was worth. With a ringing

cry, he lifted his left hand above his head.

'Behold! I am the High Priest and Servant of Mazda, God of Fire!' he said in a loud, sonorous voice. 'Fall before the symbol of the almighty, ye pigs of the earth, for Mazda has spoken through his priest. Behold!' Garvin fired two shots in the air. The bullets spat into the distance. The crack and smoke of the revolver shots, which were strange weapons to Wing Ko and his tribe, caused immense awe and consternation.

Wing Ko gave one look at the green stone on Garvin's finger, then dropped his scimitar and fell from his pony.

'Down, down on your knees, sons of pigs!' he said to his men. 'Mazda has spoken. The White Man with fire in his hands is Mazda's high priest. Down ... down!'

With one accord the yellow men grovelled in the sand before Garvin, who continued to hold his left hand above his head. On their naked bellies they crawled up to him, and one by one touched his boot with their foreheads. Wing Ko was the first to rise. He and his ancestors had been fanatic worshippers of Mazda for centuries, and the one thing of which he stood in awe was his god. He fully believed that Garvin was an ambassador from the heavens ... a sacred personage to be honoured and welcomed. From that moment, he was Garvin's slave.

'Thank Gawd!' Bill Trensham whispered to Pat, and, pocketing his revolver, walked to Garvin's side.

'Behold my friend and counsellor,' said Garvin. He whispered in English: 'Do something to amuse them, Bill, you old fool!'

Bill, struck with a bright thought, seized an electric torch which he carried in his pocket and flashed it on and off several times. Wing Ko and his men thereupon uttered loud squeals and fell on their faces again.

'Behold the friend of Mazda's high priest, who flashes the sacred fire from his hands!' said Wing Ko reverently.

Chai Yin and Ming Ho, hands folded in their sleeves, put their tongues in their cheeks and exchanged glances. Then Chai Yin moved toward Garvin.

'I have saved you, Mr. Stewart,' he said in English, his

voice like thick oil. 'You will therefore acknowledge me and my servant as your friends.'

'I'd like to blow your brains out for what you've done to Miss Moreland,' said Garvin, swinging on him. 'And I don't trust your faithful servant an inch. But just because you were educated at an English public school and at Oxford, I won't see you cut to pieces by these grinning idiots.'

Chai Yin's eyes narrowed to slits. He would like to have torn the Englishman's tongue out by its roots. But he bowed.

'I am in your hands, Mr. Stewart,' he said.

Garvin turned to Wing Ko. 'The yellow men are my servants,' he said. 'We proceed to Shang Tao now, O Wing Ko.'

'Nay,' said Wing Ko humbly. 'First will it please the high priest of Mazda to visit the unworthy home of Wing Ko and take rest and food.'

Garvin exchanged glances with Bill.

'We shall have to do it,' he muttered. 'It won't work to offend this fellow.' Aloud he said, 'I will take food and refreshment at your hands, O Wing Ko. First I will mount my camel; then follow you to your dwelling.'

'And the woman,' said Wing Ko, looking at Patricia. 'Who is she?'

Now that the first hideous danger had passed Garvin found himself able to think about Patricia. He walked to her and took her hand. She was ice-cold and shaking.

'You're all right,' he said. 'Just keep quiet and do as I tell you.'

'Oh, Garvin, thank God you've come!' she whispered.

'The lady is White Jade, my imperial bride,' said Garvin in a loud voice. 'It is written that she shall be honoured by my side. I—Gar-Vin—high priest and servant of Mazda, have spoken!'

Wing Ko bowed.

'White Jade, imperial bride of Gar-Vin, shall be made welcome,' he said.

'Lordie, how do you do it, Garvin?' said Bill, grinning. 'Old Chai Yin looks sick as mud.'

Chai Yin was sick. He had desired the English girl, and the

Englishman had claimed her. He shook with rage.

'One day he shall die,' he said to Ming Ho.

Garvin passed an arm around Patricia.

'Chai Yin—you and Ming Ho shall remain by your car while I and my friend and Miss Moreland receive the hospitality of Wing Ko,' he said sweetly.

Chai Yin was forced to obey. His eyes were slits of rage as he saw Garvin lift Pat on to his camel and follow Wing Ko and his horsemen across the moonlit desert towards the Tsi-Fu River. But he was helpless. And he knew he might have met with a frightful death at the hands of Wing Ko had he not pointed out to Wing Ko the sacred ring on the Englishman's finger.

During that ride to the river, Pat lay in Garvin's arms, with such relief and thankfulness in her heart that she could not speak. Only the great tears coursed silently down her pale cheeks, and her golden head lay motionless against his shoulder.

Garvin's thoughts were chaotic. He had won the day. For the moment he was safe. Not one of Wing Ko's men would harm a hair of their heads. And he had defeated Chai Yin and Ming Ho. But he was far from happy. This girl in his arms roused the most maddening memories in him ... memories of the love he had given her; the white-hot worship of a boy; the way in which she had led him on; then thrown him aside. Now that he had her utterly in his power he did not know whether he hated her or loved her. He only knew that he must save her from these yellow men. But some queer, cruel, hard emotion was mixed with his solicitude on this strange, wild night. For she was here, stripped of her pride and languor and whims ... here in his power, utterly thankful to be with him. It seemed to assuage the pain, the desire of long months; to make the dominant male in him triumph in the face of her defeat.

'I always thought we would meet again, Pat,' he said, looking down at her tear-stained face. 'But my God ... not under such conditions as these. How did Chai Yin get you here?'

'I was in Canhung,' she said. 'With Eric Hughes. He was

assassinated ... I don't know whether he's dead or alive. I was dragged out of the car, and found myself in Chai Yin's hands.'

'I see,' said Garvin. He shot a look at Bill, who was on the lurching camel beside them. 'Riot in Canhung, Bill,' he said briefly. 'The beginning of the trouble. They've shot Hughes.'

'Garvin,' said Pat, 'what is going to happen to us?'

'I don't know yet. But you're safe. They think I'm sacred and that you are my imperial bride.'

He felt her shiver, and drew her closer with a possessive little gesture.

'You are in my hands now, Pat,' he said. 'Do you realise that?'

Pride surged up in her. Now that she was saved from the Chinaman she was more herself, no longer a shrinking, terrified creature. And something in Garvin's eyes made her resentful of him.

'Well, what do you mean to do with me, Garvin?'

'You'll see,' he said, with a short laugh.

Her heart jerked. She looked up at him. He had changed. This was not the soft-eyed, adoring boy-lover whom she had laughed at. This was a new Garvin, with a set, hard face and cynical eyes. She bit her lip, and as she felt the hard beats of his heart against hers a slow flush crept up underneath her skin. She began to wonder what fate was awaiting her in the dwelling of Wing Ko.

The moon had paled and dawn was breaking when they reached the Tsi-Fu River. Like toy boats with jewelled lights, a couple of dozen junk-shaped house boats rocked on the pale green water. To one of these boats—a beautifully carved and gilded thing—Garvin and Patricia were taken by Wing Ko with the utmost courtesy and ceremony. It would temporarily shelter the imperial ambassador and White Jade, his bride. The house-boat had but one room and one deck. Bill Trensham, reluctant to part from Garvin, was forced to accept the courteous offer of another junk, which rocked gently on the tide alongside Garvin's boat.

'Suppose I'll see you later, old chap,' he said gloomily as he was led away.

'You'll be all right,' said Garvin, with a short laugh. 'But we can't turn down any of Wing Ko's fancies, and he is doing what he considers the most hospitable thing in sending me and my supposed bride alone to our boat.'

Wing Ko showed Garvin over the junk. He would find all the luxuries he required; food and drink would be served to him; then he could rest, and when he was refreshed should be entertained more royally by the tribesmen.

Pat and Garvin were then shut inside the gilded boat and left alone.

They found themselves in a beautiful little room, full of scarlet lacquer and rich silken stuffs ... all loot ... valuable things stolen at one time and another by the rascally Wing Ko. There were cushions on the floor, little hard stools, and low tables on which stood silver and porcelain dishes containing Chinese sweet-meats and jugs of yellow wine. Orange silk curtains and rush sun-blinds covered the windows of this junk. Pat wearily moved to one window, drew aside the curtains and looked out. Her aching eyes fell upon an exquisite sight ... the green, curving river dotted with the fairy-like boats ... catalpa-trees, green palms, and bamboos swaying softly in the dawn-breeze along the shore.

Here was rest and peace indeed after the dust and heat and discomfort of the desert.

She turned to Garvin. He was standing by a little lacquered table, pouring himself out some wine. She met his gaze, and suddenly, furiously, blushed. She realised that she had on only a thin blue cotton suit—no more than a pair of pyjamas, and that she was alone, shut in this junk with a man who once had been madly in love with her.

Garvin saw that blush, and somehow it roused all that was worst in him. He set down his glass and came up to her. He, too, was tired and hot and travel-stained, but in this room it was perfumed, cool, exotic, and the girl in the blue Chinese suit was very beautiful. He caught her in his arms.

'You and I, Pat,' he said in a low voice. 'You and I—all alone—the ambassador and his imperial bride, eh?'

Patricia put her hands on his shoulders.

'Garvin ... you won't ... you couldn't ...'

'What?' he said, his handsome eyes mocking her. 'Are you frightened of me, my dear? But how amusing. Once I was frightened of *you*—frightened to offend or hurt you by the slightest word or action. And you laughed at me. Now I can laugh at you.'

She began to breathe hard and fast.

'Have you waited all this time—to get your revenge?'

'Perhaps and perhaps not. But my chance seems to have come if I wish to take it.'

'But—Garvin—for heaven's sake——'

'Ah, White Jade, my bride,' he teased her. 'Once I loved and wanted you to madness; I think I want you still, although I've ceased to love you.'

'No, Garvin—please!'

He pressed her head back on his shoulder and put his lips to her throat. His hand burned through the thin cotton coat—burned against her back. Suddenly he lifted her off her little bare feet and laid her on a pile of great gold cushions beside him. She lay motionless, beautiful eyes fixed on him in bright terror; watched him draw the orange silk across the windows of the junk again; watched him blow out the candles which flickered in their tall, gilt candlesticks in the little room. And now the room was filled with the dusky glow of the pale dawn . . thick with the scent of burning pastilles. Outside on the river, far away, came the thin silver wail of a Chinese lute.

Garvin walked slowly to Pat and knelt beside her, a hand on her wrist.

'White Jade, my imperial bride,' he said very softly. 'Are you going to comfort me for all the hell you put me through two years ago?'

IX

Patricia looked up at Garvin and read what lay in his eyes—passion and the thirst for revenge. She could not move; she felt like one paralysed.

His fingers were like warm steel bands about her wrist. He bent his head and kissed her full on the mouth.

The insult of that kiss burned through her like a flame. She closed her eyes, and memory swung her back to the last days in England when she had seen Garvin; his boyish face bitter and scornful, while he had reproached her for the heartless way in which she had amused herself at his expense. She saw, too late, the wrong she had done him. She knew, too late, what a fatal power a woman possesses to make or mar the life of the man who loves her. She could have made of Garvin a tender, devoted lover—a faithful husband. And she had just lightly dismissed him and turned him into this bitter, revengeful man whose lips burned against hers—whose face suggested that he would show her no mercy.

The lingering kiss became a torture—unbearable shame. She gave a little moaning cry and pushed him away with two small, cold hands.

'Garvin—Garvin—don't!'

He picked her off the cushions, up into his arms as though she had been a child. He stood with her like that. He smiled down at her—a terrible little smile of passion and triumph.

'This is Fate, Pat. Fate that has delivered you into my hands. Do you remember our last few words together? I told you that one day you would pay. For three long years I've wanted to get my own back. Not a very worthy feeling, no! But you've made an unworthy fellow of me, Pat. You were so sweet, so seductive, so *amused* by my dog-like devotion to you. Ah, my dear, I don't forget other moments when I

kissed you and you responded to my kiss. But it was all for the amusement of the moment to you. While I was giving my very soul—wanting to live my life for you—you were playing. Ah, you lovely, heartless creature, Pat ... God alone knows what torments I've suffered through you.'

'I didn't know—you cared so much, Garvin,' she gasped between dry lips, her slim body shivering.

'You must have known. I told you. I begged you to marry me. You'd led me on for months—first saying you would—then you wouldn't. You wanted men to circle round you—feed your vanity—break their hearts for you. But you didn't intend to give up your freedom and marry a silly boy, did you, Pat?'

She gave him a look of entreaty.

'Garvin, I was sorry—after you'd gone.'

'Sorry? What for?' he said, with a savage little laugh. 'Oh, because I wouldn't hang round your heels and whine like a beaten cur. Only because I pushed off and left you.'

'No—I was fond of you—truly, Garvin.'

'You won't be when I've finished with you, my dear.'

'Do you hate me so much as that?' she whispered.

His eyes sparkled at her in the dim, pale dusk of the junk. He took a handful of her soft gold hair and ran his fingers through it.

'Hate you? Yes. I despise you,' he said under his breath. 'Just as I despise all women who lead boys on for nothing, as you did me. But at the same time, you're beautiful—my dear, and I want you—I wanted you long after I'd gone out of your life. Your lips ... your kisses are of the unforgettable brand ... you cruel, lovely thing.'

'Garvin—aren't you being—just a little melodramatic?' she said between her teeth. 'Put me down, please. I've been through terrible days and nights and I can't stand much more.'

'You've got to stand a lot more,' he said brutally. 'I've saved you from those yellow devils. But you're going to make up to me for the past, Pat. We're thousands of miles from civilisation, and in the eyes of these people you are my bride. Do you hear, White Jade?'

'Garvin, for pity's sake——'

'What do you know about pity?' he broke in fiercely. 'You had none on me when I implored you for it.'

'Garvin, I admit I treated you badly, but don't be utterly unmerciful to me now.'

'Adorable White Jade,' he said, with a cruel little laugh. 'And all for me——'

His lips were warm against her cheeks, her hair, her throat. He took one of her arms and wound it about his neck. He watched the red creep up under her white skin, the great tears fill her eyes. For a moment she fought him passionately.

'What right have you to insult me—to want to get back on me in this way—oh, I'm glad I didn't marry you—glad I sent you away—you cad—you brute—oh, Garvin, you brute—how I despise you!'

'Good!' he said between his teeth. 'We despise each other. At the same time we may as well love each other.'

Again his lips closed over her mouth. She suddenly collapsed, crying piteously in his arms. For an instant there was silence in the little lacquered room in the house-boat, broken only by Patricia's weeping. The sun was rising higher. Dawn had passed into morning. A shaft of bright gold sunshine pierced the orange curtains and dispelled the shadows in the bridal chamber of Wing Ko's junk. From the distance came the tinkle of many ivory lutes on other boats; the sharp cry of a bird among the bamboos on the shore.

And all of a sudden the red mists of passion and revenge cleared from Garvin Stewart's brain. He became aware of his brutality. He remembered the ghastly horrors through which Pat had recently passed. And he was being no more chivalrous or merciful than the yellow devils had been. He felt ashamed. Like one grown suddenly sober after an intoxicating draught, he flung back his head and drew a deep breath.

'I'm sorry, Pat,' he said. 'You're right. I'm despicable. Stop crying. I won't hurt you.'

He put her down on the cushions again. She turned over on her face and went on sobbing. The man drew a hand

across his eyes, walked to the window, pulled back the curtains, and flung the window open wide. A sweet cool breath of morning breeze blew against his face, cooling him. Out on the river, now peacock blue, shimmering like a broad ribbon of watered silk, the other junks rocked gently in a glory of sunshine.

Pat's sobbing began to drive him mad. He walked back into the room, hands dug in his pockets, his face grim.

'Pat—don't—don't cry any more—please!' he begged her.

She looked up at him, her face disfigured with the violence of her grief. She was utterly broken and ashamed. The horror of being in the hands of Chinese pagans had passed. And now she was in the hands of a white man who hated and scorned her. She wished in that moment that she had died . . . died before Garvin Stewart could ever hold her in his arms and force those insulting kisses on her mouth.

'Well,' she said, with a sobbing breath, 'and now what are you going to do with me?'

'That depends on Wing Ko,' said Garvin. 'I don't know yet what he intends to do—with us.'

She ceased crying, pulled herself up from the cushions, and sat huddled up, arms locked over her knees, like a child, in the blue cotton suit. Garvin, looking at her, felt a strange mixture of tenderness and hatred. She was so lovely, so lovable; yet she had treated him so damned badly at home, he thought.

'Look here, Pat,' he said roughly. 'Whatever Wing Ko decides to do with us, you are my so-called imperial bride, and you'll have to play up to that if you want to live.'

'I don't think I do want to,' said Pat.

'Rot!' said Garvin. 'I want you to, anyhow.'

'So that you can punish me a bit more?' she asked with bitterness.

'Yes,' he said. 'I haven't finished with you yet by any means. But I realise that you're at the end of your tether now, and I'm not a complete swine, in spite of what you tried to make of me years ago.'

She was stung to pride at last. She sprang up and faced him, hands doubled at her sides.

'I'm not going to give in to you,' she said passionately. 'I was sorry for what I'd done—after you'd gone—but I'm not sorry now. I hate you. I'm glad I sent you away.'

'All right, Pat,' he said. 'It's a fight to the finish between us.'

'Coward,' she taunted him.

Then she slid into a little heap on the cushions again. She was pitifully weak. In a moment he was at her side, supporting her with one arm, and with the other hand held a glass of wine to her lips.

'Drink this,' he said.

She obeyed; too wretched, too played-out to refuse. He made her drink the whole glassful, and afterwards eat one of the cakes on the lacquered table. Then, quite gently, he covered her with a rug.

'Go to sleep,' he said with rough kindliness. 'I won't touch you—oh, don't look at me like that—go to sleep. You need rest, and you'll want all your strength to get through this feast Wing Ko is preparing for us.'

She gave a tremulous sigh. For an instant she looked at Garvin's face . . . it was bitter, haggard in the golden morning light. A hundred memories of their past love pierced her like a knife. It was to be a fight between them now . . . a battle of strong wills; fierce pride. The pity of it! But she was too tired, too really ill to make any resistance now; she shut her eyes, and in a few seconds she was fast asleep.

Garvin threw himself down on the floor, put a cushion at his head, and buried his face in it. He, too, was tired and wretched. After a few moments of bitter thought, he, too, fell asleep.

And so passed the bridal night of Gar-Vin, ambassador of Mazda, the Fire God, and of White Jade, his bride.

X

At noon the following day Wing Ko held a feast in honour of Gar-Vin and White Jade. To this feast also came Bill Trensham and every member of Wing Ko's tribe. Garvin, remembering that he had left the rascally Chai Yin and Ming Ho, with their boys, in the desert, bade Wing Ko send tribesmen with food and drink to them. The tribesmen returned to say that Gar-Vin's servants and their motor-car had vanished.

Garvin had guessed that would happen. Chai Yin was on his way back to Shang Tao. Well, that did not matter. He was glad to be rid of the treacherous merchant. The next thing to do was for him to get Patricia back to civilisation, and it was not going to be easy. Wing Ko had taken an embarrassing fancy to Gar-Vin.

Pat woke from her sleep much refreshed. She felt a different being. Her one wish now was to retain her self-respect—to show Garvin that she was not a weakling; that she would not knuckle under to him. When he came to her, bearing an armful of rich, embroidered clothes and told her to put them on, she quietly refused.

'I am not going to be dressed up like a doll for the amusement of these yellow fools,' she said.

'Look here, Pat, don't be an idiot,' said Garvin. 'Wing Ko sends you these robes; he says they belonged to a Chinese Empress. He wishes you to wear them for the feast.'

'Why should I?'

Garvin eyed her angrily.

'You'll do as I tell you to do, my dear, otherwise you'll find yourself in very deep water, and I won't be able to save you every time,' he said.

She bit her lip. There was more colour in her face to-day;

more lustre in her hair, her eyes. She looked sweet and desirable. Garvin felt sick as he visualised the primitive pageant through which they must pass ... this girl, dressed up for that yellow mob ... but he knew China ... and he knew the folly of thwarting Wing Ko's desire to be hospitable.

'You must go through this, Pat,' he said. 'Otherwise I swear I won't answer for your safety. It's a question of with whom you prefer to remain—me or Wing Ko.'

She shuddered. Mechanically she reached out an arm and took the clothes from him.

'I'm going to be dressed up too,' said Garvin, with a twist of the lips. 'It doesn't please me much more than it does you, my White Jade.'

'Oh, don't call me that!' she said, stamping one small bare foot.

He laughed and swung out of the room. Pat was left alone in the junk, the heavy satin and silk of the robes which had been looted from an Empress weighing down her arm. She wanted to cry, but she was stronger to-day—too strong to give way easily. She dreaded the public festival. But she knew that Garvin was right. It would be courting disaster for her to refuse.

Half an hour later Garvin came back to fetch his 'imperial bride.' He caught his breath slightly when he saw her ... the tall, slender figure was indeed imperial in those beautiful robes, which were of old gold satin richly embroidered with great purple flowers and encrusted with jewels. The shoes on her bare feet were of gold satin, embroidered with priceless pearls and jade. Under the short tunic showed trousers of rich satin, jewelled and embroidered with purple silk and gold thread, like the coat. She had smoothed back the lustrous gold of her hair, and round her head hung a garland of exotic Chinese flowers which had been sent to her, bearing the good-will and courtesy of Wing Ko.

Pat looked at Garvin. He had also exchanged his European clothes for Chinese costume, and was magnificently attired in a jade-green robe embroidered with dragons. On his forehead hung the symbol of the Fire God,

made from priceless rubies. They stared at each other an instant. Then Garvin gave a short laugh.

'Well, we look two fools all right. Come, Pat—and for God's sake play up to these people if you value your life.'

'I don't know that I do value it, but I will do as you wish,' she said coldly.

'Give me your hand.'

She obeyed him. A little tremor ran through her as his warm, strong fingers closed over her cold ones. With sudden passion born of cruelty he bent his head and kissed that cold hand.

'You are very lovely, my White Jade,' he said

'Don't—please,' she said, shrinking away.

He laughed, and drew her out of the house-boat.

A terrifying spectacle met her eyes and caused her to draw close to Garvin again. A huge crowd of yellow men and their womenfolk awaited the imperial ambassador of Mazda and his bride. The river-banks were dotted with running, vividly coloured figures. Everybody seemed to carry something: balloons; unlit lanterns; great balls of crinkled, coloured paper and gaudy silk; toys of coloured glass hanging from long bamboo sicks. The air was seething with suppressed excitement; the noon-tide filled with cries and shouts and weird Chinese music.

Many Chinese boys, running along the banks of the river, began to let off ear-splitting crackers. Some opened gay-coloured paper umbrellas. Many carried joss-sticks; everybody seemed to have a fan. This was a festival. The ambassador of Mazda had come to Wing Ko's people, and they rejoiced exceedingly.

A litter awaited Patricia; a gorgeous thing carried by four coolies; lined with scarlet silk and with a silken canopy. Into this litter, hung with gold and silver tassels and painted with birds, Garvin lifted his 'imperial bride.' The curtains were then drawn, shutting her from the crowd. But through a chink Pat could glimpse the vivid scene, and she lay on her cushions as she was carried along, flushed, half-terrified, wondering if at any moment she would awake from an absurd dream.

The honoured guests were escorted by a reverent but excited mob to Wing Ko's house on the banks of the river. Here a great feast awaited them.

Pat was lifted out of her litter and allowed to walk beside her 'lord' into the banqueting-room. Wing Ko, in ceremonial robes, squatted on the floor of a room which was practically bare of furniture. His chief ministers and friends squatted about him. Into this honoured circle Gar-Vin and the White Jade were invited. And then Garvin saw Bill ... poor Bill, red as a peony with embarrassment, his big body looking ludicrous in Chinese robes ... with half a dozen of Wing Ko's little painted concubines hanging on to his arms. Bill greeted Garvin and Patricia with cheer.

'Gawd! I'm glad to see you folk. This is hell.'

'Buck up, old man!' said Garvin. 'And be nice to the little ladies. It's the courteous thing for Wing Ko to hand you over half a dozen wives.'

'I don't want 'em. I only want to get home,' said Bill.

The banquet began. Patricia, cold with nerves and very ill at ease, could scarcely eat or drink anything that was handed to her. She seemed to feel evil, slanting eyes focused on her from all directions. Wing Ko's hideous painted face terrified her. She admired the ease and lightness with which Garvin conversed with the leader of the desert brigands.

Twenty-four courses were served ... all kinds of strange foods in bright porcelain basins; eaten with chopsticks. Finely cut bits of duck and chicken; crystallised mangosteen; thickly syruped ginger; rice cooked in various forms; *samshu* and yellow wine in silver bowls to wash down the food.

Garvin and Wing Ko exchanged compliments in the Chinese fashion.

'The bride of the illustrious high priest of Mazda is more golden than the heart of the lotus and as white as the petals of the magnolia,' Wing Ko said affably after the twenty-fourth course.

'Yet not so fair as the almond-eyed blossom who is favourite wife of my honourable friend,' said Garvin, indicating a tiny, gaily-dressed creature who was at that

moment slanting her black eyes at Bill.

Pat, deadly tired now, weighed down by her heavy satin robes and sick of the prolonged feast, pulled at Garvin's sleeve.

'For heaven's sake let us be going,' she whispered.

'Wait,' said Garvin sharply.

Wing Ko watched them. The painted mask of his face seemed expressionless, but there was a queer look in his eyes He leaned away from Garvin, and spoke to an ancient Chinaman with a long pigtail and white moustaches drooping on either side of his withered lips almost to his waist. The old Chinaman whispered to him. Wing Ko nodded. Then the all-important moment came, and Garvin met it keenly.

'Having finished the exquisite feast at your honourable hands, O Wing Ko, I and my imperial bride and my friend would depart for Shang Tao,' he said courteously.

Wing Ko stood up.

'Behold I, Wing Ko, have taken counsel with my friend, Yo Chong, who is one hundred and twenty years of age and has much wisdom. He says that it is written that Wing Ko and his people have waited these many years for an ambassador from the imperial court of heaven, and that when that ambassador should come he should remain amongst Wing Ko and his people—for ever.'

Patricia could not understand this speech, but her heart gave a leap of fear when she saw Garvin's face whiten

'Oh God, what is it?' she asked through dry lips

'The worst has happened,' he whispered back. 'This idiot intends to keep us here. Ssh! . don't show any fear.'

In Chinese he began courteously to argue with Wing Ko and the aged Yo Chong. The argument lasted an hour and sorely tried Garvin's patience He explained that it was necessary that he and White Jade should go to Shang Tao. Wing Ko gently but firmly refused to grant him permission to go. Then Garvin grew angry—pointed out that an ambassador from the sacred court of heaven, wearing the symbol of Mazda, must not be thwarted. Thereupon the cunning old Yo Chong (who believed that Wing Ko would prosper if the white lord remained in the desert with them)

answered that it was written in the book of Mazda that Gar-Vin must remain at Wing Ko's side to worship perpetually at the shrine of the Fire God.

Patricia, watching in an agony of impatience, saw Garvin's face grow paler and his teeth bite into his lower lip.

'We're in a pretty fix now,' he said under his breath. 'It seems that you and I will end our days with these yellow devils, my dear.'

Wing Ko began to show annoyance. He did not see why Mazda's high priest should wish to depart for the city of Shang Tao, which he considered pagan. No—he must remain with Mazda's people and worship with them.

Garvin knew the Chinamen too well to prolong the argument. The only thing to do now was to temporise. He gave in to Wing Ko's wishes as gracefully as he could.

Wing Ko thereupon smiled again.

'It is well, O Gar-Vin,' he said. 'You and your White Jade shall be honoured amongst my people, and with your magic fire shall fight with us in the desert.'

'The magic fire will stop as soon as I run out of bullets, my friend,' Garvin muttered in English. He looked across the room at Bill, who was begging mercy from his admirers. 'Bill, we're in the soup,' he said gloomily. 'Wing Ko refuses to let us go. But it's me he wants . . . and Pat. I'm going to try and get you a free pass back to Shang Tao.'

'For Gawd's sake do. I can't stand all these butterflies,' said Bill, who retained his sense of humour in any crisis. The slender arms of the little painted concubines were wreathed about him from all sides. Giggling and cooing, they were making love to him in their Chinese fashion.

Garvin returned to argument with his host.

'It is written, O Wing Ko, that my friend and counsellor, Tren-Sham, shall return to Shang Tao and fetch more magic fire and the possessions of Gar-Vin which lie in his imperial palace in that city,' he said.

This request seemed to Wing Ko and Yo Chong a reasonable one. They did not mistrust Gar-Vin. In their ignorant, childish way, they were afraid of him. But they did not wish him to leave them. They believed their prosperity would increase if the sacred priest of Mazda remained

amongst them.

Bill Trensham, therefore, was allowed to leave Wing Ko's camp. With two camels and two Tartar guides, he was escorted into the desert. No longer laughing, but deadly serious, the boy bade good-bye to his leader. He realised the frightful position in which Garvin and Patricia were placed.

'Don't worry, old man,' he said. 'This is a splendid effort on your part—getting me back. I'll fetch the troops out to rescue you and Miss Moreland, of course.'

'I hope to God things go well with you. If I can keep up appearances here for a few weeks, Pat and I won't be harmed,' said Garvin.

'Mr. Trensham, take me with you,' Pat said, her cheeks burning hot. 'I don't want to stay with Garvin.'

'I'm sorry, my dear, but you've got to,' said Garvin, before Bill could reply. 'Wing Ko is not going to let you go. He has just stated that he is confident that if you bear a son to Garvin in the midst of his tribe, the people will be for ever blessed by Mazda.'

'Oh!' gasped Pat, and hid her face in her hands

She felt Garvin's arm about her. He was leading her back to her litter. She was to be taken back to the junk. The long noon was waning. Stars were coming out one by one in the deep blue of the sky. The people, still in festive mood, were dancing along the banks of the river. Now the lanterns were lit; the lights, like sparkling jewels on long, bamboo sticks, flashed through the dusk. Fire-crackers were discharged and fizzed golden sparks into the air. Every house-boat was hung with lanterns, and the calm river reflected a thousand rosy lights.

It was beautiful and barbaric. But Patricia's heart was like lead. She could not forget what Garvin had said. And when she realised that she was being forced to remain here in this outlandish desert spot at Garvin's side—the two of them virtual prisoners in the hands of Wing Ko—she felt sick with disappointment and fear.

'Oh, God, let Bill Trensham get home and bring help to us,' she inwardly prayed.

But the tormenting day was not yet over and the night was young, and she and Garvin were allowed back to the privacy

of their junk only for an hour's rest. Then they were dragged to Wing Ko's temple, where they were forced to assist at the sacrifice to Mazda the Fire God. Garvin was asked to officiate, and although his very soul recoiled from the pagan rites, he went through with them ... because he knew it would cause suspicion if he hesitated. Like one in a daze, Patricia, from the back of the temple, with a crowd of Wing Ko's foolish, chattering women, watched the sacrifice of a young lamb, which was killed and roasted over the sacred fire, which burned brilliantly in a huge steel basket. It was Garvin who plunged the silver knife into the poor little bleating creature; Garvin who lifted his hands, red with blood, and chanted to Mazda; Garvin who led the priests to the altar and worked the people up to a frenzy of hysterical joy.

She watched it all, feeling sick and terrified. But she was forced to admire Garvin's pluck and initiative. He became at once the idol of the people and the friend of Wing Ko. When, finally, she was allowed to return to the peaceful lacquered room on the junk, she was so tired that she could scarcely stand. She took off her garland of flowers and flung herself down on the cushions.

Garvin removed his thick satin coat and searched the pocket of his own drill suit for a cigarette. He smoked in silence for a moment, his eyes fixed on the girl. Then he said:

'That's over, thank God.'

She looked up at him. 'It's been a ghastly, interminable day. Oh, my God, if Bill Trensham doesn't get back——'

'If he doesn't—we stay here—for ever,' said Garvin. 'And you know what Wing Ko expects of us.'

'Oh, it's monstrous—I won't stand it—I won't stay with you!' the girl flashed, crimson to the roots of her hair. 'I shall throw myself into the river if you touch me.'

Swiftly he moved to her side, bent down and drew her into his arms.

'No, my dear, you won't be allowed to do that,' he said softly. 'If I stay here in the desert until I die ... you stay with me. That will be your punishment, darling, and my consolation.'

She hit him across the face.

'I shall hate you till you're dead, Garvin.'

'No—we shall love each other until we are dead,' he corrected, kissing the hand that had hit him and mocking her with his handsome eyes.

'Leave me alone ... leave me alone!'

'Oh, don't worry,' he said coolly, flinging her away from him back on to her cushions. 'I don't think I do love you very much—to-night. Go to sleep, my beautiful Pat, and dream of the days when you drew men to your feet and then kicked them away.'

'Brute—cad!' she sobbed at him.

He turned from her, shrugging his shoulders. He neither spoke to her nor touched her again through that long, quiet starlit night. But it was she who slept calmly, he who was wakeful, listening to her soft breathing; suffering; not knowing whether he loved or hated this girl whom Fate had delivered into his hands.

With the dawn of morning came disaster.

A coolie who had accompanied Bill Trensham into the desert came stumbling back to the Tsi-Fu River, naked, bleeding, more dead than alive. He fell across the step of Wing Ko's junk in which Garvin and Patricia were resting. Garvin heard the thud of the body as it fell across the door, and went quickly to open it. When he saw the man he leaned down and touched him on the shoulder.

'Boy, what is it? What has happened?' he asked.

'Fight ... murder ... Nyi Hung, the priest from Kara-Ning, attacked us in the desert,' the coolie muttered, his head lolling back against Garvin's arm.

'My God!' said Garvin, his cheeks whitening. 'Nyi Hung ... attacked you ... and Mr. Trensham?'

'They—wounded—him—carried him off.'

'God!' said Garvin again. 'Back to Kara-Ning?'

'Yes, master . they tell me ...to tell you ... no see him again unless you go fetch him and return White Jade to the Tiger God.'

'Are you speaking the truth?' asked Garvin roughly

But the wretched coolie dropped at his feet—dead.

Garvin returned to Patricia.

'That ends it,' he said sombrely. 'Poor old Bill met Nyi Hung and his men in the desert, and they have taken him prisoner, back to Kara-Ning.'

Patricia's heart sank.

'Then that—is our last hope. Oh, Garvin——' She hid her face in her hands, sick with the bitter disappointment.

'No—it doesn't end it,' said Garvin fiercely. 'I'm damned if I'm going to leave Bill there in those devils' hands. I brought him out to the Nobi Desert and I'm going to stick to him. Pat . . . you must stay here. I'm going to lead Wing Ko and his merry men against the city of Kara-Ning . . . and bring Bill back.'

'Wait—Garvin—you won't leave me here——'

'You'll be all right,' he said half kindly, half roughly. 'I'll tell Wing Ko to leave guards for you.'

She put a hand to her throat.

'I'm afraid . . . these yellow brutes . . . Garvin, take me with you.'

'No, my dear . . . nowhere near Kara-Ning for you. Nyi Hung is only waiting for you, and he'd see that you died this time.'

She began to tremble violently.

'Can you . . . be sure that Wing Ko's men will protect me?'

'Yes. Certain. He regards you as sacred . . . my imperial bride. There's not a soul in the tribe who would want to touch you. They're superstitious devils—they'd be terrified to lay a hand on the bride of Mazda's ambassador.'

'Very well,' she said through dry lips. 'Go, Garvin—and good luck.'

He looked at her with sudden admiration.

'By God, you're brave, Pat!' he said.

Then flung out of the room before she could speak to him again.

Ten minutes later the river seethed with excitement. Hundreds of yellow men—fierce tribesmen who had followed Wing Ko into the very teeth of danger for years—gathered around in response to Garvin's call. He told them that Nyi Hung, the pagan priest who worshipped the foul Tiger God, had laid hands on the sacred person of Tren-

Sham, friend and counsellor of Gar-Vin. He urged Wing Ko and his men to battle against Kara-Ning.

Wing Ko's slanting eyes gleamed wickedly. For many moons he had longed to lay siege to Kara-Ning. Rich loot therein awaited his men. He had only to be encouraged by Gar-Vin to make plans to rescue Tren-Sham, and set fire to the pagan temple, and thus offer fresh glory to the sacred God of Fire.

Pat, looking out of the window of her junk, saw a small army of yellow men on their black ponies, with Garvin and Wing Ko at the head, depart into the desert for Kara-Ning. Not a soul was left on the river save the giggling, foolish women and two coolies on guard outside Pat's door.

Pat paced up and down the room, her lips forming a prayer for Garvin. If he should fail . . . if he should not come back? . . . oh, God, what would her fate be? She could not, dared not think. Yet she knew that Garvin had done the only one thing possible in going to the rescue of poor Bill Trensham, who might be tortured hideously by the fanatic priests into revealing her hiding place.

When dusk fell that night, after a long day of anxiety, Pat fell asleep on her cushions in the junk. The moon was hidden behind a bank of cloud. A terrific downpour of tropical rain clattered on the roof of the house-boat and punctured the sombre green of the river.

Pat wakened from uneasy slumber to *feel* that somebody had entered her room. It was so dark that she could see nothing. But she awoke with a violent start and sat up, panting. She saw a tall, shadowy figure now, and her heart leaped with terror.

'Garvin!' she whispered. 'Is it you?'

But a hand closed over her mouth and she heard an oily, familiar voice whisper against her ear.

'Not Garvin, my White Jade . . . but Chai Yin . . . come back for you . . . come for his White Jade. Nay, do not scream, Golden Lily. I strangled your guards with silken cords, and they will never hear your cries. There is nobody to save you now . . . you are mine!'

XI

Patricia grew ice-cold in the yellow man's grasp.

'Chai Yin!' she said in a suffocated voice. 'My God—Chai Yin—come back!'

She knew now why she had had a presentiment of fear when Garvin had left her; why torturing, shadowy doubts had hung over her all day. Chai Yin was not, as Garvin had imagined, many leagues away from the Tsi-Fu River and bound for Shang Tao. He had been in hiding, probably in Wing Ko's river-village itself, all this time, the cunning rogue.

Patricia felt the man's arms about her, lifting her from her cushions. She fought like a tiger-cat. She was not weak, hysterical, exhausted as she had been when he had attempted to abduct her before. She had had plenty of rest and food and she was a brave woman. She grappled with the Chinaman with a frenzied strength that astonished the man. One of her small fists, clenched, landed straight in his left eyeball, and he let her go with a muttered oath.

'Be careful, White Jade,' he said lifting a hand to the inflamed and injured eye. 'You shall be punished for your hot, wild temper—beaten with golden rods, my Peerless One!'

Patricia was not listening. With a heart pounding violently and eyes blazing with determination in her small pale face, she scrambled onto her feet after he had released her and rushed to the window of the junk. She dragged aside the curtains and a shaft of white moonlight pierced the gloom of the lacquered room. It was close upon midnight; a calm, lovely night on the rippling Chinese river. But in that little room passions seethed. Hot desire and fierce, defensive pride grappled with each other.

Patricia, panting, her back to the window, saw the tall figure of the Chinaman plainly now. He was disguised very cleverly in the baggy blue cotton trousers and coat of a poor man, with a long pigtail. There were hundreds of such men in Wing Ko's village. No doubt Chai Yin carried various disguises in his baggage, Patricia reflected, and had crept back with Ming Ho and remained hanging about the river-banks like this, awaiting his chance to seize her.

The pulse in her throat throbbed so hard that she could scarcely breathe. She felt the wicked, gleaming little eyes of the merchant on her. But she was not going to give way without a terrific struggle.

Suddenly her gaze fell on a small scarlet lacquered stool just to the right of her. A curved knife lay there; an antique and beautiful weapon with a carved ivory handle. The blade was polished steel, it had a wicked-looking edge to it. Patricia's hand darted down and seized this knife. Chai Yin saw her action and laughed, a low, sinister laugh that filled the shadowy little room with horror.

Then he sprang at her.

But he was too self-confident in his belief that the White Jade would not have the pluck to strike at him. As he lurched up against her, he felt an agonising pain in his side. His bland yellow face assumed a comic, astonished look ... then contracted with agony. He gave a sick, retching gargle and collapsed at her feet.

Patricia stood motionless, horrified by her own action. She had plunged that curved knife into Chai Yin's side. She did not think he was dead, because his long body twitched at her feet and little grunting moans escaped his mouth. But perhaps he was dying. And she had done it ... *she* had stabbed him. How beastly! She gave one sick look at the carven ivory handle sticking out of the merchant's side, then ran to the door and opened it, sobbing under her breath.

For a moment while she stood there the warm river wind beat against her face. She was drenched in moonlight; a strangely beautiful figure in her blue cotton suit, which had replaced the heavy robes in which she had attended Wing Ko's feast and sacrifice, golden hair like a nimbus of light

about her small head. Then a hand touched her arm. She screamed, her nerves on edge, and saw a young Chinaman with a shaven skull and grinning face standing before her. But he did not seem unfriendly. He broke into a flow of Chinese which she could not understand, and pointed to two huddled bodies which lay on the river-bank opposite the junk. She realised that they were the corpses of the guards Wing Ko had left in charge of her; men who had died at their posts of duty; strangled swiftly and silently by Chai Yin.

Patricia wished she could speak Chinese. But she could only gesticulate and point helplessly toward the interior of the junk. The Chinaman leaped in and looked, then returned grinning and nodding, as though pleased at what he had seen. He was obviously one of Wing Ko's followers; a very young Chinaman, perhaps not more than sixteen or seventeen, who had been left behind with the women.

Patricia looked about her, her brain working rapidly. She wanted to get away from the river; to get to Garvin. She knew she would no longer be safe in the junk. She had settled Chai Yin for the moment, but he might recover; she had not mortally wounded him, and there was Ming Ho to be reckoned with. Heaven alone knew where Ming Ho lurked, waiting to spring upon her.

She turned to the young Chinaman and began to talk to him, using one or two Chinese words which she had learned since coming out to China. She said 'Kara-Ning' and 'Gar-Vin' over and over again. The boy listened and stared, and gradually light broke across his rather stupid, yellow face. He nodded. He understood. The beauteous White Jade wished to go to her lord at Kara-Ning. Although Pat could not comprehend, he said:

'I will take you thither, O White Jade. Wait . . . I will fetch ponies.'

He darted away like a rat scuttling up the river-bank. Patricia, shivering from head to foot in spite of the hot tropic night, stared desolately after him. Where had the boy gone? Would he come back? What would happen to her now?

'Oh, Garvin, I wish to God you'd never left me here alone,' she moaned.

She looked down at the hem of her Chinese coat, and saw that it was stained with a great patch of red. She shuddered violently. Chai Yin's blood Her frightened eyes took a swift, backward look at the junk wherein his body lay. Her teeth began to chatter.

Her relief was enormous when she saw the young Chinaman return to her within a few moments, leading two little desert ponies.

'You will take me to Kara-Ning?' she cried excitedly.

'Kara-Ning,' said the boy, nodding and grinning

Patricia's heart leaped. Strength and courage returned to her; the colour came back into her white cheeks. If she could get to Kara-Ning, to Garvin, she would be all right. Wing Ko's men in their hundreds were there. They would be her protection against Nyi Hung, who wanted her body for sacrifice.

Guided by the boy, Patricia mounted her pony, and the next moment they were galloping side by side over the hot sands ... racing with the hot wind against their faces ... toward the ancient city of Kara-Ning

It was a long ride. Desert ponies are swift and tireless, but Patricia's slender body ached cruelly after the first few hours of riding. She was on edge all the way, afraid lest at any moment Ming Ho, servant of Chai Yin, should see her, seek retribution for the injury she had done his master.

Ming Ho, however, was awaiting Chai Yin with the Citroen-Kegresse many miles in the opposite direction, *en route* for Shang Tao, so she need have had no fears And when at last she and the young Chinaman sighted the colossal peaks of the Ki-Shan Mountains she grew quite cheerful. Garvin was there; Garvin and poor old Bill Trensham She hoped Garvin had been in time to rescue the nice Englishman from those fanatic yellow devils.

The night had passed, and the eastern sky was streaked with vivid colours in the dawning, when Patricia rode within sight of Kara-Ning. Across the pearl-grey heavens, as though a painter's brush had pencilled them, were jagged strips of apple-green and lemon-yellow and mauvish-pink. A beautiful desert morning. The highest peak of the Ki-Shan, like a

dark, gigantic shape against that exquisite sky, was veiled in moving, billowing masses of cloud.

But the peace and beauty of that dawn were marred by the blood-red lust and passion of battle; of fierce, hand-to-hand fighting inside the gates of Kara-Ning. The quiet morning when usually one might hear the soft tinkle of temple bells or of an early riser singing in his flower-filled garden, was made hideous with the blood-curdling yells of Wing Ko's fighting hundreds and the astonished cries of the men and women of the city, who wakened to slaughter, plunder, and, in many cases, death.

At the head of the attacking army rode Gar-Vin, the ambassador of Mazda, and beside him Wing Ko, whose wicked little eyes sparkled with rapture. This was the dream of his life—to attack this city and ride triumphant through its streets. He had whirled his scimitar about his head and shouted: 'Praise to Mazda and his servant,' when a swarm of his fierce little yellow men had scaled the mighty gates of Kara-Ning, dropped on to the other side; strangled the sleepy guards ere they could defend themselves, and flung the great gates open wide to let him and his army pour through.

The inhabitants of Kara-Ning were in reality a peaceful people; simple; content to bow before the administration of Nyi Hung, who was virtually ruler of them, to work in their rice- and bean-fields, or drowse in the hot sunshine under their *shen-yin*-trees, or make love in their gardens where the red hibiscus grow and the pale gold oleanders nod beside the flaming glory of the peonies.

When they realised that the dread desert brigand, Wing Ko, and his fierce men were riding through the city, murdering and looting to the right and the left, they were seized with panic. Most of the folk shut themselves up in their huts and pagodas, wailing to the Tiger God for protection. But in the temple of the Siberian Tiger God, Nyi Hung—more cultured and fully alive to the dangers threatening him—organised a little army of priests and servants for self-defence.

Bill Trensham, gagged and bound, lying in one of the cells

under the temple, heard the tumult overhead and wondered at it. He was more dead than alive. His clothes were in ribbons (Bill had put up a good fight before he had been taken prisoner by the priests), his face was livid, his fair hair matted with blood He had been handled roughly by the Bonzes, and now he lay here in a dank, rat-ridden cell awaiting something worse than death. He was to be put to the torture at daybreak. He had been asked by Nyi Hung repeatedly where the White Jade had been taken, and he had refused to speak. One of the aged Bonzes who had made a study of languages had acted as interpreter. And Bill Trensham had learned that since he would not answer with kind treatment, the whereabouts of the White Jade would be dragged from him by force.

Brave man though he was, Trensham sickened and shuddered at the prospect of torture ... Chinese torture at that ... the most foul and cunning .. each agony inflicted calculated to open the victim's lips but not to kill.

'I'll do my best to stick it without giving the girl away, Garvin, old chap,' Bill muttered to himself again and again. 'But it's going to be hell ... You'll have to forgive me, if I'm tried beyond my powers of endurance.'

Poor old Bill! He would have given half his life during those hours spent in that cell to find himself back in civilisation, having a 'peg' with one of the fellows at the Shang Tao Club.

Then, when he heard the *thud, thud* of steps overhead he pricked up his ears and wondered what was taking place. Could Garvin by any chance have come to rescue him?

Outside the temple Wing Ko and his men galloped and circled, uttering their war-cries. But they were up against something more substantial than a wooden hut or paper-weight pagoda. This pagan temple was built of stone and marble and almost impregnable.

Whilst Wing Ko and Garvin sat their ponies and talked in consultation, Patricia and her young Chinese guide rode through the gates of Kara-Ning.

Pat looked about her in breathless excitement and some fear. Everything was so quiet ... yet so sinister. She seemed

to feel thousands of wicked slanting eyes watching her through shutters and sun-blinds. How innocently lovely the gardens looked; how exquisite were the lily-ponds, with their darting goldfish and silver minnows; the chirping birds hanging in their bamboo cages; the persimmon-trees, heavy with red fruit; the lilies, the roses; the sweet-scented almond-trees.

Then a cry of pain rent the air. The kindly Chinese boy, who had brought the White Jade to her lord, toppled from his pony, a knife in his throat. It had been flung at him with deadly, unerring aim from some shuttered window.

Patricia sent a terrified cry through the quiet of the morning.

'Garvin! Garvin!'

Garvin heard it; swung his pony's head round, his thin brown face flushed and amazed.

'Great heavens! that was Pat!'

To Wing Ko, he said:

'Behold, the Imperial Bride of Gar-Vin has come with some message of vital importance. I will bring her thither.'

The next moment he cantered though the main street of the city and met Patricia, urging her pony toward him. He gave one amazed look at the slim, blue-clad figure.

'What are you doing here? In the name of heaven, Pat, are you mad, to follow me here? I left you safely in that junk——'

'Safely!' she broke in, with a hysterical laugh. 'No, Garvin. Last night Chai Yin broke into my junk.'

'Chai Yin! The devil!'

'Yes, and I—stabbed him.'

'Good girl,' said Garvin. He had reached her side and wheeled his pony round and was trotting along by her. 'And how did you find your way here?'

'That poor boy——' She swallowed hard, and pointed back at the body of the young Chinaman, lying across the road with the knife in his throat. 'One of Wing Ko's men. He brought me. They've just ... killed him.'

Garvin bit his lip.

'Death lurks at every corner in this damned city, my dear.

You aren't safe here by any means. Take this revolver It's loaded. Use it if you have to. Now keep close to me, whatever happens.'

She looked at him, tears in her eyes. She was very tired after the long ride over the desert, and the morning was scorching hot.

'Garvin, what's going to happen?'

'I don't know,' he said grimly. 'We've got to get Bill. He may be dead or alive. But he's in that temple, and I'm not leaving Kara-Ning till we've got him out.'

He noticed suddenly how fatigued she looked After all, she was only a slip of a girl, and she had no right to be out in this hot sunshine without a hat on her head. With rough tenderness he took off his topee, which he gave to her

'You must wear this. Put it on Oh, you little fool, to come here ... into the teeth of the danger What am I going to do with you now?'

'Nothing. But I prefer to die decently by you than to be carried off by that foul Chinaman, Chai Yin,' she said

Unwillingly he admired her. He felt almost that he could have taken her in his arms in this moment and kissed her . . she was so plucky. But he only said:

'Now, stick by me, Pat . . and play up to these folk of Wing Ko. They regard you as an imperial bride, you know.'

Three dozen of Wing Ko's little yellow men were hammering with stout poles on the huge oaken door of Nyi Hung's Temple, when Gar-Vin and the White Jade, sitting their ponies splendidly, rode side by side up to Wing Ko

XII

The mighty doors of the temple remained unshattered despite all the pounding and knocking of Wing Ko's army.

Garvin, the sweat pouring down his face, began to be more than ordinarily worried about his friend.

'It's the deuce,' he muttered to Patricia. 'If we can't get inside the temple, poor old Bill is doomed.'

Wing Ko's eyes became slits in the painted mask of his face.

'If it is impossible to break through into the pagan temple, O Gar Vin, then it is necessary that we procure a treasure to offer as ransom for the sacred person of Gar-Vin's friend and counsellor, Tren-Sham.'

'Quite so,' said Garvin gloomily. 'But who ... and how can such a ransom be procured?'

An idea struck Patricia. She plucked at Garvin's sleeve.

'If only you could get rid of the Silk Moth——' she whispered.

'The Silk Moth!' Garvin's eyes sparkled. 'Yes, by heavens, that's an idea, Pat. Nyi Hung's daughter ... the only thing he prizes. If we could get her and carry her off! Wait ... I know her window ... the window by which I was to have waited that night when I fooled her.'

He turned to Wing Ko.

'The Lotus-Bride, my imperial wife, has received a message from Mazda,' he said. 'Mazda bids us take the daughter of the high priest and hold her as hostage until Nyi Hung delivers the person of Tren-Sham safely back to his friends.'

Wing Ko bowed to the saddle.

'Mazda's words, spoken through the golden lips of the Lotus-Bride, are pearls of wisdom,' he said reverently. 'Let us procure Nyi Hung's daughter.'

'I think I can get her,' said Garvin, his face grim. 'Stay by the White Jade, O Wing Ko, until I return.'

'Gar-Vin has spoken,' said Wing Ko, and drew his pony close to that of the girl.

Garvin dismounted and walked quickly round the temple to the women's quarters, wherein the Silk Moth had waited for him on the night when he had met her by the Jade Tomb. He wore his own clothes . . . drill shirt open at the throat . . . khaki riding-breeches He had given Patricia his hat, but his thick brown hair protected him from the hot rays of the sun. He had also given Pat his revolver. But, like a Chinaman, he carried a knife, and he was going to use it, if necessary.

He reached the window of the room wherein Silk Moth had bidden him come to her. There was no glass to that window. It was merely an aperture with iron bars, which were movable, and a rush sun-blind.

Garvin called softly.

'O Silk Moth . . . are you there?'

He heard a rustle . . . a woman's chattering voice . . a little scream . . a giggle His heart leaped with excitement when the soft voice of the high priest's daughter replied in her native tongue:

'O White Lord, is it you?'

'I was prevented from coming to you that night of love,' said Garvin hurriedly, his lips against the rush blind 'But now on the hot wings of passion I come O Lily-Bud Listen . . . the outlaw, Wing Ko, storms the doors of your father's temple and I am afraid for you Take down the bars of your chamber and lean out your head, O Desert Flower, that I may be refreshed by the sight of your beauty.'

'How can I be sure you are not lying to me, O White Lord,' sighed the voice of the Silk Moth

The foolish Chinese girl had never forgotten the rapture she had experienced in the arms of the Western man. It took Garvin but a few seconds of flattering and subtlety to break through the walls of her suspicion. The next moment she had taken down the bars of her room and leaned out her head. Her slanting eyes sparkled flirtatiously at Garvin. Her black, stiff hair was piled high on her head and stuck with green

jewelled pins. She was a green moth this morning ... in emerald satin coat and trousers embroidered with gold dragonflies. She gave Garvin her tiny hands. He kissed them and flirted with her for an instant. Then he murmured:

'Is the other white lord within the sacred precincts of the temple, O Silk Moth?'

'The poor fool lies in the cells,' said Silk Moth. 'My father intends to torture him—to drag from him the secret of the White Jade's disappearance.'

Garvin stiffened. Torture, eh? By God, he would put a speedy stop to that. Quick as thought he seized the tiny figure of the Chinese girl and dragged her bodily through the window.

She screamed shrilly and beat against his face, realising now that she had been fooled again. But Garvin ran with the kicking, struggling little figure ... ran until he reached Wing Ko and Patricia.

'Behold Nyi Hung's daughter,' he said, setting the Silk Moth on her feet.

Wing Ko spat at the feet of the Chinese girl.

'Daughter of vice ... offspring of the spawn of evil,' he snarled at her. 'It is time the pagan gods you worship were laid in the dust.'

The Silk Moth cowered back, terrified. She was surrounded by Wing Ko's soldiers. She was not brave, and her little yellow face turned a greenish pallor with fear.

'Behold, now we have hostage, O Gar-Vin,' said Wing Ko. 'Nyi Hung is stubborn, so we will go back to the river with the girl.'

'My father ... my father!' shrieked the Silk Moth, stamping her small feet with rage and fear. 'Help, O my father!'

Nyi Hung, surrounded by his priests, heard that cry. The pretty, painted evil little creature who was his own flesh and blood was the one thing on earth that he cared for. He uttered an oath that made his priests blanch.

'They have taken my daughter,' he said. 'Death to them!'

He ran quickly to a secret opening in the temple wall and put his lips to the hole.

'Give back the daughter of Nyi Hung,' he shouted.

'Give back Tren-Sham, friend of Gar-Vin,' Wing Ko shouted back.

'No—never,' said Nyi Hung. 'First we will drag from him the secret of the White Jade's disappearance.'

'Fool,' said Wing Ko, 'the White Jade, imperial Lotus-Bride to Mazda's ambassador, rides here at his side.'

'She belongs to the god of my ancestors,' screamed Nyi Hung. 'Give her back to us.'

Patricia shuddered and drew close to Garvin. His hands closed over hers.

'You're all right; don't worry,' he said.

A fierce argument ensued between Nyi Hung and Wing Ko, punctuated by wailing cries for help from the Chinese girl. Garvin interpreted the conversation for Pat. Wing Ko demanded the release of Trensham. Nyi Hung demanded his daughter—and the White Jade in return. If the White Jade were not given back Trensham should remain in the temple.

'Very well,' said Wing Ko stubbornly 'Behold, we return to the river with the Silk Moth.'

Nyi Hung gnashed his teeth. But dearly though he loved his daughter, he was determined to regain possession of the White Jade. She had been sacrificed to the Tiger God and then stolen from his very jaws. It was sacrilege. Unless she were restored to him, the people of Kara-Ning would be cursed. If he kept the Englishman he believed he would have some chance of seeing both his daughter and the white woman again.

'Do you refuse to give up the white lord in return for your daughter?' Wing Ko asked finally.

'I do,' said Nyi Hung. 'I will give him back only for my daughter and for the White Jade.'

'Then we go,' said Wing Ko.

'Remember,' added Garvin, in a ringing voice, 'if you harm one hair of the white man's head, your daughter shall be tortured.'

Silk Moth let out a piercing cry at this.

'If when the White Man is delivered up to us he is not well cared for, the Silk Moth shall suffer.' Garvin rubbed this well

into the stubborn high priest. 'So look you to it, if you would preserve your daughter's comely limbs, you must preserve the life of Tren-Sham.'

That was as far as he could get. But he believed that Nyi Hung would not torture Bill if he thought his daughter would likewise be tortured. Gloomily Garvin left the city with Wing Ko's men and the two girls. He hated leaving poor old Bill behind him.

The Silk Moth was a nuisance. She screamed and kicked and moaned until she had to be gagged, bound, and placed across Wing Ko's pony. Patricia rode back across the hot desert at Garvin's side, feeling sick and weary.

'Whatever happens that girl must not be harmed,' Garvin muttered, with an eye on Silk Moth. 'If Nyi Hung gets wind that she is being ill-treated, he will kill poor Bill. This is a question of time ... of who will hang out longest. Poor old Bill.'

'I'm sick of it all,' said Pat. 'I wish to God one of us could get back to civilisation.'

'No chance of that,' said Garvin, with a short laugh. 'You must remain on the Tsi-Fu River with me, my White Jade, I regret to inform you.'

'You are still unfriendly,' she said bitterly.

He gave her a look that made her flush.

'Far from it. The knowledge that you are alone with me in the desert and so completely in my power intoxicates me, my dear.'

'How brutal you are, Garvin!'

'How brutal you were to me, once!'

'Still vindictive!'

'If you put it that way—yes. However, if you are unkind to me, the little Silk Moth will doubtless console me. She has an eye for my manly beauty.'

'You're intolerable,' said Pat.

'Perhaps you're right,' said Garvin in a sullen voice. And in a vague way he knew that she was right. He ought to beg her pardon; to be gentle and nice to her. But some demon of bitterness, of spite, kept him from giving way to his good impulses. Revenge was sweet ...

By noon they were back on the river — a glittering green and gold river in the hot blaze of the sunshine. The womenfolk ran out from their huts and junks with cries of welcome and garlands of flowers for their heroes. A great many spoils were brought back to them from Kara-Ning.

Wing Ko suggested that Nyi Hung's daughter should be placed amongst his slaves, but Garvin quietly objected to this.

'The Silk Moth is my prisoner,' he said. 'And as Nyi Hung has my friend in his hands, so shall I keep the Silk Moth with me.'

Wing Ko retired, none too pleased. Garvin realised that the desert outlaw was disappointed. He had looked on the Silk Moth as a toy to be played with contemptuously, turned into his slave. But it was vitally necessary that the Chinese girl should remain unharmed ... she was hostage against poor old Bill. All the same, it was not a good move to annoy Wing Ko, and Garvin was filled with gloomy, anxious thought when he carried Silk Moth to his junk.

The Chinese girl seemed more content with Garvin.

'Am I to stay with the White Lord?' she asked him coquettishly when he placed her inside the little lacquered room wherein Patricia lay on the cushions, resting.

'For now—yes,' he said.

Silk Moth eyed Patricia distastefully.

'I very much dislike the hideous white woman,' she said.

Garvin laughed. He flung himself into a chair and lit a cigarette.

'Do you hear that, my White Jade,' he said. 'The Silk Moth thinks you are hideous and dislikes you.'

Patricia sat up. She looked from Garvin to the tiny Chinese girl in her emerald suit.

'It must be amusing for you, Garvin,' she said. 'You are quite the sheik ... with two women to manage.'

'The Silk Moth doesn't count—really,' he said. 'But you, my White Jade——' He held out a hand. 'You do want managing. Come and talk to me.'

'Do you want me to wish that I had let Chai Yin take me back to Shang Tao?' she said through set teeth.

'Chai Yin.' Garvin repeated the name in a sharper voice. 'Ah, yes. Where is that devil? I want to reckon with him.'

'He's gone,' said Patricia. Her eyes were fixed on a red stain on the polished wood of the floor. 'That's where he lay ... but he's gone. Ming Ho no doubt has fetched him. We haven't finished with him yet, by any means.'

The Silk Moth squatted on the floor, legs tucked under her in Chinese fashion. She was hungry, and she had found some rice-cakes. She was nibbling at them like a little animal, not understanding what the two white people said and not caring very much.

A knock came at the door.

Garvin opened it. A Chinese boy, one of Wing Ko's servants, stood there. He spoke to the white lord for several minutes, then kow-towed and departed.

Patricia, always uneasy, stood up and looked at Garvin anxiously when he returned to her.

'Well? What is is? What did he say?'

Garvin's handsome eyes were mocking. He took one of her hands and deliberately bent and kissed the delicate wrist.

'A charming interlude after war and bloodshed, my White Jade,' he said. 'Wing Ko sends word that to-morrow is the Feast of the Lanterns. To-night he sends us a bridal ship built of cedar-wood and canopied with silk. Escorted by hundreds of little boats, alight with Chinese lanterns, you and I are to float down the river when the moon rises and whisper our love to the stars. Romantic, isn't it?'

She wrenched her hand from his, panting, crimson.

'How dare you? Take the Chinese girl—not me.'

'No, White Jade. The Feast of Lanterns is also one of love. To-night, at moonrise, you and I will forget our troubles and celebrate the feast.'

XIII

'I refuse to come with you,' said Patricia.

'I think not, my White Jade,' he said, smiling. 'Unless you want Wing Ko and his people to become very suspicious of you—and of me.'

'I can be ill, can't I?'

'Imperial brides are never ill,' he mocked. 'Never too ill to lie on a cushioned barge and float down the river.'

Patricia put a hand to her head.

'If you knew—if you knew how much I hate you. Oh, you've got the devil in you, Garvin . . to stand there, smiling at me, making a mock of this thing.'

She looked so tired, so wretched, it was in the heart of the man, who had once loved her, to put his arms about her and comfort her But the very fact that she hated him—told him so—taunted that 'devil' in Garvin. He set his teeth.

'The Silk Moth wouldn't be so unwilling to come,' he observed, with a glance at the Chinese girl, who was squatting on the floor and watching him with black, rather sullen eyes.

Two red spots flamed on Patricia's cheeks

'I wish to heaven you'd take her, then.'

Garvin laughed and held out a hand to the Chinese girl.

'Would the Silk Moth like to come with Gar-Vin to the Feast of Lanterns, and lie in his arms in the bridal ship?' he asked in Chinese.

Nyi Hung's daughter rose to her feet, tottering a little on her 'golden lilies'; her small, painted face eager, her red mouth amorous.

'Will the White Lord take the Silk Moth?'

Garvin, keeping his eyes fixed on Pat, who stared at him in frozen disdain, put an arm round the little jade-clad

creature, who giggled and clung to him delightedly.

'Alas, I would if I could, but the mighty Wing Ko demands that I take my imperial bride—the White Jade.'

Silk Moth shot a jealous look at Patricia and burst into a flow of Chinese abuse which fortunately Pat could not understand. She followed it up by an entreaty to Garvin.

'Leave the foolish White Jade behind. Tell Wing Ko I am your favourite concubine.'

'But you're not,' said Garvin shortly. 'And never will be, my child.'

The Silk Moth looked up at him with glittering black eyes.

'Illustrious one, you cannot want that stupid white woman who is so cold to you. Bah! She should be in her place in the Jade Tomb. O Gar-Vin, take me for your woman——'

Garvin shook his head. Nyi Hung's daughter was a little pagan without morals—she had had a barbarous upbringing. He did not blame her. She had not had the chances of the usual Chinese girl in civilised China, where maidens are virtuous and honourable. But he was not one whit moved by her pretty, kittenish ways or entreaties. He had only put an arm about her and teased her to incense Patricia. Pat was white and scornful.

'Your conduct only makes me despise you, Garvin,' she said.

Garvin flung the Silk Moth away from him, and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, walked to the door of the lacquered room, his face bitter and moody.

'I really don't care whether you despise me or not,' he said. 'Get on your festive robes and be ready for me when I come to fetch you. If you don't, you'll only make Wing Ko suspicious, so I advise you to play up to this invitation.'

Pat held her golden head high.

'I'll "play up to it," but I want you to know that I shall loathe every minute spent with you.'

'Splendid!' he sneered, and went out, shutting the door.

Once he had gone, Patricia's eyes swam with tears. Blindly she began to take off her blue cotton suit and dress herself in the gold satin and purple robes which she had worn for the feast with Wing Ko five days ago. It seemed to her that five

years rather than days had elapsed since that feast.

The Chinese girl, back in her corner on the floor, watched the White Jade robe herself; her slanting eyes envious, her mouth agape. She was sulking because the White Lord refused to love her. She was wishing herself back in her father's temple But both she and Patricia were at a disadvantage with each other; unable to understand each other's language. So the Silk Moth said nothing and Pat said nothing. They just looked and thought.

The swift Eastern darkness fell. Patricia, robed and ready for the festival, her face white, set, and joyless, looked through one of the windows of the junk and saw that the river was dotted with tiny, miniature boats in which lanterns had been set. They bobbed and floated down the river like fairy barges glowing with rose-red light. It was the prettiest possible spectacle, and if Pat had not been quite so miserable and worried she would have enjoyed the sight.

On the shore young boys and children ran to and fro, waving long poles on which lighted lanterns had been set, and burning joss-sticks. The night was full of gay sounds: the twang of many lutes; the droning of Chinese voices; the beating of drums. A huge figure of a heathen god was being drawn along the river-banks by a crowd of people wearing hideous masks; some on stilts, like giants Around this god, drums were beaten and crackers going off ... whizz! . bang! ... whizz ... showers of golden sparks falling through the velvet darkness of the night.

Everybody had a lighted lantern. It was the Feast of Lanterns. The Silk Moth, roused from her sulky reverie by the shouting, singing and sound of the crackers, knelt at one of the junk-windows and clapped her hands joyfully, like a child, at the sight. Little things pleased Nyi Hung's daughter. She had a tiny, shallow mind in her tiny body, and no hurt went very deep with her. She forgot to be homesick for Kara-Ning or to sigh in vain for the love of Gar-Vin in the pleasure of seeing the festival.

Every now and then as a firework was let off she gave a little shriek of glee, and poured a torrent of incomprehensible Chinese forth to Patricia. But Pat, standing rigid, like a

figure of marble in her beautiful robes, neither answered nor appreciated what she saw and heard. The brilliant spectacle terrified rather than amused her. It was all so barbaric, so utterly uncivilised, and, although she had Garvin to protect her, she was afraid of Garvin; of his bitterness; his apparent desire to punish her for the wrong she had done him years ago.

He came for her, resplendent in his own festival robes. His mood had changed. He was masterful, passionate, compelling her to obey him. The fire in his eyes made her tremble. She could deal with the Garvin who mocked and taunted her, but this man with the deadly serious face and hand clasping her fingers with feverish intensity she feared.

'Come, my White Jade,' he said as he led her out of the junk. 'The night, the stars, the very essence of romance awaits us.'

She tried to answer disdainfully, but could not. The fierce pressure of his fingers made her weak and shaking. Her heart pounded; her eyes entreated him vainly.

An ear-splitting roar of welcome greeted the 'imperial ambassador of Mazda and his imperial bride' when Garvin and Patricia appeared on the river-bank. Wing Ko met them in state, and gave them each a lantern on a slender golden pole.

He pointed to a small barge, cunningly built from cedar-wood and canopied with crimson silk. Under the canopy was a heap of cushions, nothing more. Paper lanterns of every hue crimson, green, blue, purple were set all round this charming boat, which bobbed up and down on the water.

'Behold, O Gar-Vin, the bridal ship. In it you and the White Jade shall float a mile or more surrounded by legions of tiny boats, each alight and containing the written prayer of one of Mazda's people. It is the Feast of Lanterns, and Mazda, God and Fire and Light, shall answer the prayers of his people. A little way you shall accompany them; then, while they float on to eternity, you shall come back and give us assurance that Mazda has listened.'

'Even so, O Wing Ko,' said Garvin gravely.

'Many of my people wait down the river-banks to pull you

with their poles back to shore and bear you in chairs to your junk. Hail, O Illustrious One!'

'Hail, Illustrious One!' echoed a thousand throats.

Pat shivered, but Garvin's fingers tightened about her hand. He drew her into the gold and crimson ship, lifting her over the lanterns. Then he placed her on the cushions. He took his place at her side; his hand, bearing the sacred symbol of Mazda, raised in response to the cheering and shouting of the yellow men and women, who childishly believed that he was about to bear their petitions to their god on this night of festival.

A dozen hands pushed the bridal boat into the middle of the river. A thousand tiny barges, with their bobbing lantern-lights, floated about the big barge bearing the ambassador and his bride. As the current bore them more swiftly downstream the sound of cheering grew fainter and the shore, ablaze with lights from the lanterns swinging everywhere, grew more distant Patricia found herself alone with Garvin on the river; a silken canopy over her head hiding the stars.

Garvin's gaze met hers. His lips smiled, but his eyes were still masterful. He put an arm lightly across her.

'Wouldn't you like to forget that you hate me, my White Jade . . . to forget the past bitterness . . . to forget everything save the exquisite beauty of this night?' he murmured. 'Look at the water all around us . . . all the lovely little prayer-boats and their flickering lights. Isn't it beautiful?'

She looked at him through narrowed eyes.

'The beauty of the night doesn't move me, Garvin, any more than your absurd attempt to ape the "imperial bridegroom." It just disgusts me.'

Garvin's cheeks burned. He set his teeth.

'Oh, it just disgusts you, does it, White Jade? And don't you think I was disgusted with you when you led me on, fooled me, flattered me, used me for as long as I amused you; then told me to go away and be a good boy?'

She moved restlessly under that strong arm which pinioned her.

'The old grievance. Can't you ever let the dead past bury its dead?'

'No—it rankles, my dear ... it has rankled for years.'

'Maybe I was in the wrong, Garvin, but you won't get any pleasure out of revenge.'

'That is for me to decide. Anyhow, I've got it—a very unexpected one, too. You—in my hands ... my lovely one!'

He laughed, and suddenly put his head on her shoulder. She shrank back, trembling, gasping, but he dropped a dozen hot little kisses on the cheek nearest him; on her hair, her cheek, her neck.

'You can remain like an alabaster statue, my White Jade, but I'm human and I adored you once. ... I swore to make you pay for your cruelty. Here we are on the bridal barge ... alone ... under the stars on this magic river. Ah, my dear ... and you're so lovely!'

She saw his eyes burning down at her through the dusk; felt his arm pinion her closer; his lips against her hair. A wild, chaotic feeling engulfed her. If this man had truly loved her, been the humble lover of years ago, some responsive emotion might have stirred in her veins on this night of Oriental witchery. Here they were, as he said, alone under the stars; floating down the moonlit river; surrounded with hundreds of friendly little petition-boats, with their rosy, twinkling lights; the silver silence of the night broken only by the soft swish of the water against their barge; the faint cries of people on the river-banks; the music of the Chinese lute.

But Garvin Stewart was not her lover. He was only a passionate, embittered man taking his revenge, wanting to see her humiliated, humbled to the dust. For this, she was not going to surrender pride and tell him how she had suffered after she had sent him away; how she had longed to make amends. She refused to yield to her softer impulses—turn to him and tell him she had loved him and wanted him once he had gone—could still love and want him now. She was too proud for that. He wanted revenge. Very well, she would battle with him to the last. She dug her teeth into her lower lip and tried to thrust his arm away from her.

'Let me go ... I hate you, Garvin ... I despise you.'

'Then we despise each other, my White Jade. But I want to kiss you.'

'Let me go, I tell you!'

He laughed and drew her closer to his side. Looking at her—the disordered flowers in her pale gold hair, her terrified face, the trembling figure in the gold embroidered robes—he felt not only passion, but an immense desire to set aside prejudice and bitterness and frankly, genuinely worship her. A groan broke from him.

'Pat . . . oh, Pat!' He forgot the Chinese name which had been given to her—everything except the old, wild love he felt for her.

'Garvin, let me go . . . please.' She was reduced to pleading with him now. Her feeble strength was futile against his. That arm across her was like a steel band holding her down.

'Pat—we loved each other once—let us love again,' he said. 'Oh, my dear . . . we're in constant danger, we have only each other to cling to . . . let us snatch happiness while we can.'

'Happiness?' she repeated, the tears rushing to her eyes. 'When you are so cruel . . . so vindictive?'

'But I love you still——'

'You don't! You don't! Let me go!'

He buried his face against her golden hair.

'One moment, my White Jade—"One moment in annihilation's waste!"' he quoted passionately.

Neither of them noticed that a change was taking place outside . . . neither could see the sky, which was hidden by the crimson silk canopy. But the moon was now hidden behind a great bank of black cloud. Not a star twinkled in the darkness. Wind had sprung up, ruffling the waters. Many of the pathetic little prayer-boats became soaked and sank. The bubbling river extinguished each rosy lamp with a sharp hiss.

The beautiful night had changed with that terrifying rapidity common to the climate. A *buran* was coming over the great Nobi Desert and sweeping to the Tsi-Fu River.

The first intimation Garvin had of the storm was when the barge began to rock perilously. He let go of the girl. She began to cry, her face hidden on the cushions. He put his head out and looked critically at the stormy sky. The passion in his eyes died.

'My God!' he said. 'We're in for a hurricane.'

Pat lifted a face stained with tears.

'A hurricane? But, Garvin——'

'God!' he ejaculated again as the barge rocked up and down, caught by a sudden strong gust of wind. 'They ought to tow us in. This is damned dangerous.'

She forgot her fear of him and caught his arm with her trembling fingers.

'Garvin, shout to them ... tell them to take us on shore.'

Garvin shouted lustily in Chinese. But the howling of the gale, which increased every moment, drowned his voice.

The *buran* had come. And now the heavens themselves seemed to open and let down torrents of rain ... such rain as Pat had never seen in her life before. The horror of that storm and the appalling swiftness with which it reached its climax imprinted themselves on her brain for ever. She scarcely had time to think about it when down came that torrential rain, soaking the silk canopy, beating it into a shapeless mass—drenching her and Garvin to the skin.

They heard faint cries from the river-bank. Although they did not know it, they were passing the spot where a little party waited to tow the bridal barge into shore with ceremony. The river became swollen and angry within a few moments; the poor bridal barge was swept with increasing rapidity downstream. The noise grew deafening; the sharp hiss of the tropic rain as it punctured the water; the shriek of the *buran*, which swept like a monster across the desert, destroying everything as it went. Patricia put her fingers to her ears.

'Garvin ... Garvin ... we'll be drowned!' she wailed.

'God,' he said, his cheeks livid. 'And there are crocodiles in this river, my dear.'

'Garvin!' she screamed.

'Oh, my dear, my dear!' He suddenly caught her in his arms and held her close, as though to protect her from the rain and the force of the gale, which was lashing the water into fury about the frail barge. 'Oh, my dear, if this is the end of all things, forgive me my brutality.'

'Garvin,' she sobbed. 'Forgive me, too.'

He tried to answer, to seek her lips with his mouth. But

suddenly a terrific gust of wind, shrieking like a hideous living thing about them, tore the silk canopy right off the barge and exposed them fully to the fury of the elements. Now, gasping, shuddering, clinging to each other, they could see nothing; only an impenetrable and fearful darkness. Every light had been extinguished. Every boat, with its paper lantern, had gone down. Wing Ko's people had fled, wailing, to their huts and junks, believing that Mazda was angry and had refused to hear the prayers offered him.

Garvin tried to speak again, but another ruthless sweep of the *buran* swung their hapless craft round and round in a circle. The water rose in a bubbling jet and crashed over them, swamping them. They were swept apart . . . torn from each other's embrace . . . soaked, beaten half breathless. Then they found themselves in the river, choking as the cold water rushed down their lungs.

Patricia's voice wailed just above the hideous din of the storm.

'Garvin! . . . Gar-vin!'

He heard her and was helpless. He could not see her—could not see through the appalling curtain of rain and blackness which had fallen between them. And then a strong current swept him right away from the scene of their disaster. He was a good swimmer, but no human strength could avail against that tide. He only just managed to keep his head above water as the river bore him swiftly downstream. He told himself that Pat was probably dead . . . drowned by now. And at any moment he might be seized by a crocodile in this river, which he knew was infested with the creatures.

The *buran* shrieked on like a wicked, live creature, enjoying the agony and terror of its victims.

XIV

The storm subsided almost as rapidly as it had risen. The whole thing was over in less than half an hour. And then the clouds dispersed; the moon shone out radiantly over the wreckage; the stars twinkled again; the wind died down. Soon there was not a sound; the night was as serene and lovely as it had been when the beautiful bridal barge had started on its journey accompanied by the little lamp-lit prayer-boats.

But the Feast of the Lanterns was finished. A note of tragedy and disaster hung over the Tsi-Fu River, the waters of which were still swollen, but running calmly through the desert toward the sea.

Garvin Stewart, mercifully, was spared a ghastly death in the jaws of a crocodile. When the storm ceased and the moonlight reappeared to illuminate the scene for him, he was still swimming gallantly, and he could see that he had been washed many miles down the river and was now close to the river-bank.

Exhausted, battered, his eyes inflamed, he managed to swim to the nearest landing-place; caught at the rushes and dragged himself on to the bank. For a moment he lay face downwards on the sandy earth, panting, recovering his breath. Then he looked up and gave a groan.

'Pat ... oh, poor little Pat!'

He staggered on to his feet, and strained his eyes to see up the river down which he had been washed. But there was no sign of Patricia. Everything was ominously still. He believed that she had been drowned; that it was the end; and his soul was sick within him.

Then he examined his surroundings, and saw, silhouetted against the moonlight, a palm-tree, and close to it a brown

hut built of mud. Possibly the dwelling of some lonely Chinese fisherman.

To this hut Garvin stumbled, more dead than alive; crushed by the thought of Patricia's awful death.

He was literally astounded when the door of the hut was opened cautiously and he saw the familiar figure of a Chinaman in a black cotton suit, with a flat, Mongolian face and broken, discoloured teeth. Garvin said hoarsely.

'*Ming Ho!* Good God!'

Ming Ho, servant to Chai Yin, made a clicking noise with his tongue. His slanting eyes flamed.

'The illustrious Mr. Stewart,' he said in English. Then he added in a sarcastic voice: 'My honourable master will welcome you, most assuredly.'

Garvin walked into the hut. Chai Yin was there, reclining on the floor on a pallet He looked sick and ill; his yellow face was a greyish colour and a black growth of beard and moustache made him altogether an ugly and unpleasant spectacle. When he saw the drenched figure of the Englishman (Garvin was a ludicrous sight in his undergarments, having discarded his heavy robes in the water) he gave a grunt and his eyes narrowed to slits.

'Mr. Stewart? To what is the poor merchant indebted for this visit from his illustrious fiend?'

Garvin rubbed his inflamed eyes.

'Let's cut out the flowery speech, Chai Yin,' he said. 'I'm not in the mood for it. What are you and your toothless devil, Ming Ho, doing here?'

'Ming Ho brought me here after your charming lady, the White Jade, put a knife in my side,' said Chai Yin, with an oath. 'The fiends take her! She put poison as well as a knife into me—I have been close to death. Ming Ho found this disused fisherman's hut, and here I have been trying to recover my health. And you?'

'I have been washed up here in the storm,' said Garvin. 'A pity you did not die, my friend, when the White Jade knifed you. You are the cause of all the trouble. I have been waiting an opportunity to call you to account for the abduction of Miss Moreland from Shang Tao.'

The Chinaman grinned up at him.

'You will scarcely call me to account for anything, Mr. Stewart. You are in *my* hands now.'

'Oh, am I?' began Garvin.

Then he stopped. He felt a sharp prick in his back. Turning, he saw Ming Ho. The evil-faced Chinaman was holding a knife against Garvin's spine.

'Mr. Stewart will do as my honourable master bids him,' Ming Ho said, with a venomous smile.

Garvin reflected. He had no weapon of any sort. He knew Ming Ho to be a marvellous, agile wrestler—a past-master of the art of jiu-jitsu. Futile to fight Ming Ho—just at the moment. Garvin was exhausted after the violence of his journey down the swollen and angry river. Ming Ho had the upper hand now. Garvin found that knife pricking his skin most uncomfortable. He shrugged his shoulders.

'What do you want with me, Chai Yin?' he asked.

Chai Yin pointed to his side. Opening his jacket, he revealed a mass of blood-stained cloths.

'I am badly hurt,' he snarled. 'You have knowledge of doctoring, Englishman. You are what I want ... and you shall cure me of my ill.'

'I'm damned if I will!' began Garvin hotly. But he broke off as Ming Ho's knife pricked him again.

'Refuse and you die, dog!' said Chai Yin. 'And if you make any attempt to make my wound worse rather than better, Ming Ho will plunge that knife into your back. You understand?'

'Oh, very well,' said Garvin, with a short laugh. 'But even if I want to doctor you, Mr. Chai, I have no tools.'

'Ming Ho has the –tools,' said Chai Yin. 'We carry a first-aid case in our car, which lies at the back of the hut. Ming Ho knows nothing of surgery—only of herbs. But you, I believe, studied at Bart's in your youth.'

'I did,' said Garvin.

'Then Ming Ho shall hand you the "tools" as you call them and you shall clean up my wound,' said Chai Yin. 'And mark you, my flend, if you kill me—you die, yourself. Ming Ho will stand at your back, with his knife ... ready and waiting.'

'Pleasant little fellow,' said Garvin. 'And after I have doctored you, Mr Chai . . . what will you do with me then?'

'We shall see,' said Chai Yin.

He groaned and grunted as he tried to turn over, and cursed his wound.

Ming Ho produced a case containing surgical implements, bandages—everything necessary for a minor operation.

With Ming Ho pricking his back with the point of a knife, Garvin was forced to kneel beside Chai Yin and clean up the Chinaman's wound. And while he did so—sick, exhausted, cursing the luck that had brought him here—he wondered how far this hut was from Wing Ko's settlement; how he could escape and get back to Wing Ko. He wanted to ascertain definitely whether Pat were dead or alive. If she lived and was alone in the hands of the yellow men a fate worse than drowning might await her.

He cleaned up Chai Yin's wound, the sweat dripping from his forehead, his thought agonising.

Had he but known it, Patricia was not lying in the bottom of the river, nor being devoured by crocodiles.

She lived. Her fate had been lighter than Garvin's in that fatal storm. Instead of being caught in the current which bore Garvin downstream, she managed to find a piece of timber from the wrecked barge; clung to it desperately; and was washed in amongst the rushes fringing the river-bank. It was a terrifying experience while she was in the water. Every instant she expected to receive death in the jaws of a crocodile. She was blanched and sick when at length she was flung against the sharp rushes. Pricked and bleeding about the hands and arms, she pulled herself on to land.

She searched desperately for a sign of Garvin. But he was nowhere to be seen.

She sobbed his name aloud.

'Garvin! . . . oh, Garvin!'

She forgot the bitterness between them; the fear she had known in his hands. She remembered only that he had been her lover and that just before the *buran* had torn them apart they had been clasped in each other's arms. All the old, sweet passion of love and longing had revived.

And now he was dead ... must be dead. ... And she was terribly alone.

Shuddering, swaying, she looked about her, and realised that she was quite close to Wing Ko's settlement. A yellow man had seen her. Several people were running toward her. Everybody had been watching out for Gar-Vin and his bride.

Pat watched the Chinamen approach. What would happen to her now that Garvin had gone? She could not speak Chinese. And she was a girl. ...

The yellow men reached her, surrounded her, chattering and gesticulating, their slanting eyes fixed inquisitively on her. Then she was seized by a pair of strong arms, hoisted on to the shoulders of a tall, hefty-looking Chinaman, and carried along the river-bank to Wing Ko, who awaited news of Mazda's ambassador.

As Pat was carried into the house of the brigand chief, drenched and shivering in her wet robes, her teeth chattered and her eyes dilated with fear.

What would Wing Ko say to her ... *what would he do with her* ... when he knew that Gar-Vin was dead?

XV

In the banqueting hall, wherein a feast had recently been held in honour of Mazda's ambassador and the imperial bride, Wing Ko awaited the White Jade.

Patricia was carried shoulder-high into the presence of the desert chief and set down before him. She stood motionless, head drooping, her ceremonial robes stiff and dry about her. She felt stiff and sore, and more frightened than she would care to admit of the Chinese brigand whose slanting, squinting eyes rested upon her with some curiosity.

Wing Ko sat in a scarlet lacquered chair, the arms of which were carved in the shape of dragons. His thin yellow hands gripped the dragons' heads. They were hideous hands, the nails sheathed in long, pointed cases of gold which he had looted from some wealthy mandarin who had never reached the end of his journey across the great Nobi Desert. He wore a kind of jewelled crown on his shaven skull, and a coat of blue and gold. Obviously he was in ceremonial robes. Patricia felt that he was sitting in state; in a sort of judgment upon her. The only other person in the room was the aged Chinaman with the long white moustache, whom she had noticed at the feast.

Wing Ko spoke. The staccato, nasal words, uttered in Chinese, made Patricia's heart sink. She could not understand. How could she conduct a conversation with Wing Ko when neither spoke the other's language? Her relief was considerable when the old Chinaman addressed her in broken English. He was the learned member of Wing Ko's tribe. He could interpret.

'Honourable lord, the august Wing Ko, would velly much know where illustrious ambassador, Gar-Vin,' he said in a high, quavering voice. He was nearly blind.

'Tell the honourable lord that I, White Jade, imperial bride to Gar-Vin, do not know,' said Patricia.

She spoke up bravely, remembering how Garvin had addressed these pagan fools; telling herself that she must remain dignified, and above all show no fear. Wing Ko's black slits of eyes were focused on her and never wavered. Patricia stood erect, her golden head flung proudly back, although every nerve in her body was quivering.

Wing Ko spoke again. The old Chinaman said:

'Speak, O White Jade, and say what happened to you and illustrious Gar-Vin this night which was august Feast of Lanterns. Black devils come and make great storm. Mazda velly angry. Wherefore has Gar-Vin failed and Wing-Ko's people offended the gods?'

Patricia reflected a moment. The old man intimated that Wing Ko imagined the storm had arisen because Mazda was annoyed with his people, and he blamed Garvin . . . thought Garvin had failed the people. This was very serious and she realised it. But she maintained a proud front.

'Tell your honourable lord, Wing Ko, that Gar-Vin has not failed; that the storm was not the outcome of Mazda's wrath, but a natural disturbance of the elements.'

The old man repeated this to Wing Ko, who scowled and sucked his teeth a moment. Then he broke into a babble of Chinese which was interpreted to Patricia thus:

Wing Ko did not believe that the hurricane was a natural disturbance of the elements. He was sure it was a direct sign from the heavens, of Mazda's disapproval, wherefore the prayer-boats had all been sunk and the bridal barge destroyed. If the White Jade considered that Mazda was not angry, what had she to say about Gar-Vin's strange disappearance? Was it not a fact that the gods in anger had swept Gar-Vin into the darkness of death in the river; that his carcass would rot therein and his spirit for ever be tormented?

To this Patricia answered bravely that she was sure her imperial bridegroom was not dead, and would return to Wing Ko's people bearing tidings of Mazda's good-will.

Wing Ko, upon having this interpreted to him, leaned forward and regarded Patricia intently, his claw-like hands

clenched over the dragons' heads on his lacquered chair.

His next words were to demand what reason she had to believe that Gar-Vin still lived.

Patricia hesitated. The blood drained from her cheeks and her heart pounded, but she tried not to show Wing Ko how desperate she felt. In her heart of hearts she believed that Garvin had been drowned; otherwise surely he would be here with her now. Yet, of course, she had no definite proof that he was dead. There was a chance that he had been swept far down the river and might at any minute turn up A forlorn hope. She clung to it, she was determined to make Wing Ko believe it, because her own danger was acute

She bade the old Chinaman tell Wing Ko that she was positive that Gar-Vin lived. He had gone mysteriously to Mazda for a sacred audience In a few days, perhaps a few hours, he would return and set the minds of Wing Ko's people at rest. Meanwhile she, the imperial bride, wished to remain in solitude and prayer. (This Pat said in fear and trembling, lest Wing Ko or any of the yellow men should lay a hand upon her in Garvin's absence)

Her cunning bore fruit up to a point. Wing Ko deliberated; discussed the affair with the aged counsellor, then decided to give Gar-Vin time to return

His orders were that the White Jade should return to her junk and remain locked therein, where she might indulge in prayer to Mazda. If, as she said, Gar-Vin returned after audience with Mazda, all would be well. If he did not come back, however, she must suffer the pangs of death with him.

This intimation filled Pat with terror She demanded haughtily what Wing Ko meant by this, and was told pleasantly, with sinister calm, that if Gar-Vin had met with his death in the *buran*, thus proving the anger of the gods, she, his imperial bride, must join him. It was not meant, Wing Ko said through the interpreter, that the Lotus-Bride should be separated from her bridegroom.

Patricia, white to the lips, but with a courageous smile, asked what manner of death would be meted out to her. She received the frightful information that she would be burned alive; placed on a funeral pyre which would be lit to celebrate

the death of the imperial ambassador and to chase away the evil spirits.

For a moment Patricia felt she would drop at Wing Ko's feet, fainting. Her brain reeled; her whole soul shrank from the prospect of such a ghastly fate. To be burned alive ... publicly tortured, killed, to satisfy the heathen people who believed that Garvin had failed them, and in consequence demanded the death of his bride. An even worse fate than the one Nyi Hung had condemned her to in the temple at Kara-Ning. There she had suffered mental agony, but she had expected a sharp knife-thrust to end it all. To be placed, alive, full of health and vigour, on a ghastly funeral pyre, around which the yellow fiends would dance and jibber ... oh, God, it was too much! ... her lips felt dry, her throat burned as she stood there, hearing her fate. And yet ... even that horrible death was, perhaps, preferable to insult from Wing Ko's hands. He might have doomed her to life-long torture ... placed her in his concubinage.

Behold, my honourable lord gives you until the Full Moon,' she heard the old man's quavering voice. 'If by the next Full Moon the illustrious Gar-Vin does not return to you, you must die, O White Jade.'

'It is understood,' said the girl through bloodless lips.

Yesterday, the 14th of July, had been the full moon. Rapidly calculating, she worked it out that the next full moon would be about the 13th of August. One month ... and if Garvin were dead ... she shuddered from head to foot.

Then suddenly across her mind flashed the thought of Bill Trensham—poor old Bill who was still a prisoner at Kara-Ning. If she could only get hold of Bill, he might help, even if only to kill her outright before they could torture her. The colour flooded her cheeks. She looked at the old Chinaman, her blue eyes brilliant and eager.

'Speak to your honourable lord and say that I, White Jade, the Lotus-Bride, demand an audience with Gar-Vin's friend and counsellor, Tren-Sham.'

Wing Ko looked surprised at this.

Tren-Sham, he reminded Patricia, was a prisoner in the hands of Nyi Hung, the high priest at Kara-Ning.

Tren-Sham, said Patricia, must be brought back to Wing Ko. The Silk Moth, the daughter of the high priest, was in the hands of Wing Ko. Surely an exchange of prisoners could be arranged?

Wing Ko considered this. Then to Patricia's relief he observed that he would send messengers to Kara-Ning and ascertain whether Nyi Hung would be willing to effect the exchange. Personally, Wing Ko added, he did not think Nyi Hung would agree. He wanted the body of the White Jade, also. But Wing Ko would not part with the White Jade, who, if she must die, should die meetly on Gar-Vin's funeral pyre.

And that was as much comfort as Pat extracted from the discussion with Wing Ko. Shivering despite the heat of the night and her heavy, stiff ceremonial robes, she returned to her junk.

The Silk Moth was still there; rather a wretched, pathetic little thing; tears making a channel through the coat of paint on her small face. She had been alone all night in the great storm, and the junk had rocked so violently that it had made her sick, and she had been afraid it would at any moment break from its moorings. She seemed quite pleased to see the white girl, but only for an instant did the two girls face each other, then the Silk Moth was taken away to Wing Ko, shrieking and kicking her tiny feet in the air. Wing Ko ordered that the White Jade should be locked in her junk alone that she might spend the hours in solitary prayer.

Till the next full moon . . . one month . . . one month of agony and suspense and waiting for probable torture and death.

Once she was alone, Patricia broke down. She was brave, but this was a strain on the nerves that very few strong men, let alone a mere girl, could stand. She knelt at one of the little windows of the junk, parted the orange curtains, and stared at the river, sobbing convulsively. Through the tears her eyes strained at the green, rippling water for a sight of Garvin . . . but she saw nobody . . . nothing but the other junks rocking on the tide.

The night had passed . . . a hideous, disastrous night.

Dawn was breaking; exquisitely beautiful; the sky streaked with amber, rose, and pigeon-blue. But the calm, the golden serenity of it mocked Patricia. Where was Garvin? Was he drowned? Would he come back? She had only two slender threads of hope: that Garvin would return; or that Nyi Hung would let Bill Trensham come back in exchange for Silk Moth. But if Bill came, he might only die with her.

The girl knelt there staring through the little window. Great, tearing sobs shook her from head to foot.

'Garvin, Garvin!' she moaned. 'Garvin, if you are dead, would to God I had died with you!'

She could not forget their last few moments together in the bridal barge; his arms about her, his lips on her mouth; the blinding veil of rain lashing between them; his voice saying: 'Oh, my dear, if this is the end of all things, forgive me!'

How utterly she had forgiven and wanted his forgiveness! She loved him, and she knew he had loved her, too, at the end. And it was too late. That green, shining river, reflecting the golden glory of the sunrise, was only a cruel, rapacious monster that had opened its jaws and dragged Garvin down to a watery grave.

She had lost him for ever.

Before her rose the hideous painted face of Wing Ko, with his evil eyes and claw-like hands. She could feel him gloating over her ... over her torture and death. She felt sick with horror ... a horror of China and all its yellow men, which imprinted itself on her brain for ever.

She turned her eyes from the river and sank into a little, broken heap on the floor, crying:

'Garvin ... Garvin ... Garvin!'

XVI

Kept at his distasteful work by the constant prick of a sharp knife in his back, Garvin continued for a full week to doctor Chai Yin in the fisherman's hut several miles down the river.

By the end of that week Chai Yin's wound had cleared up and began to heal. Garvin was clever at surgery, although he had never completed his training. His desire to enter the medical profession had evaporated just about the time that Patricia Moreland had entered his life and 'let him down,' after which he had returned to China.

He managed to complete Chai Yin's cure, although he felt a dozen times a day that he would like to have thrust a scalpel into the treacherous Chinaman's heart.

Ming Ho took a fiendish pleasure in torturing the Englishman whom he had hated in Shang Tao. He saw to it that Garvin had little to eat and plenty to do. Garvin was locked in the stifling heat of the hut and made to wait hand and foot on Chai Yin. The confinement and lack of fresh air, coupled with insufficient food, made Garvin rapidly lose flesh. By the end of that week he was thin and white, and, as he was not allowed the luxury of a shave or even a wash, he looked a sorry spectacle; a stubbly growth on chin and upper-lip; his only clothing the torn under-garments in which he had arrived.

'The white dog will crawl to my feet soon, O Illustrious One,' Ming Ho told Chai Yin one morning, while the two Chinamen watched Garvin clean up the hut.

'Let him crawl,' said Chai Yin indifferently.

Garvin heard. But he said nothing, only went on sweeping the filthy floor. He was by no means ready to crawl to Ming Ho's feet. There was a good deal of life left in Garvin. The only fear that tore his heart was for Patricia. Day and night

the thought of Pat haunted him. If only he knew whether she were living or dead! If only he were with her, wherever she was; at the bottom of the river or in Wing Ko's hands.

A hundred ways and means of escaping from Chai Yin and Ming Ho entered his mind, but he could not, somehow, achieve escape. He was always baffled. And soon he began to wonder just how long the yellow devils would allow him to live, once Chai Yin was well again.

By the end of the ninth day he learned what lay in the mind of the Shang Tao merchant, who was well enough now to travel back across the desert in his Citroën-Kegresse. He intended to take Garvin Stewart with him.

'Why not let me plunge my knife into the dog's back and leave his carcass to the jackals?' Mingo Ho suggested.

Chai Yin shook his head.

'Nay, Ming Ho. I feel by no means a well man. My wound might break out afresh when we are in the middle of the desert. I will keep the doctor-fool with me that he may attend me. Once we are in sight of Shang Tao, I will silence him—for ever,' he added in a sinister voice.

Garvin's eyes narrowed. He had heard this conversation, and he knew now where he stood. He was to be conveyed by the Chinaman within a few miles of home . . . then murdered. An agreeable thought.

But it was not so much the anticipation of death—so ironically near all his friends in Shang Tao—as anxiety about Pat that tormented Garvin. He did not want to leave this district until he had had definite proof of her death. If she were alive and in the hands of Wing Ko—helpless, unprotected!—that idea sent Garvin nearly insane. All bitterness, all malice toward Pat had long since died in him. He felt nothing for her now but passionate love. And he could do nothing. He had no firearms, no method of fighting his two yellow captors, who, between them, watched him night and day.

His despair was acute when, on the tenth day, he was forced into the car beside Chai Yin. Ming Ho seated himself at the wheel and started the Citroën-Kegresse on the return journey across the desert. Eyes red and inflamed in his

haggard, unshaven face, Garvin looked back at the river . . . that shining, treacherous river on which he and Patricia had floated in their bridal barge to celebrate the Feast of Lanterns.

Now, now when he thought her dead—drowned—poor, beautiful Pat with her pale gold hair tangled in the weeds under the river, blue eyes staring, sightless, passionate young heart for ever stilled, how bitterly he regretted all his unkindness to her. She was the woman he loved—had always loved. And he would never see her again.

The car moved quickly away from the Tsi-Fu River into the arid wastes of the desert. Soon the river was lost to view. Garvin stared ahead of him, hoping that, if death were to come, it would come soon.

But the utter despair of such a thought did not last long. It was not in Garvin's nature to give way to despair. He tried to see a glimmer of light in the darkness. Pat may be alive. He must live to see her again; to save her.

He turned his tormented eyes to Chai Yin's bland yellow countenance; then to the Chinaman in front of him, driving the car. He set his teeth.

'You may die before I do, my friends,' he said to himself. 'We shall see . . . we shall see!'

Chai Yin's gaze rested mockingly on the Englishman's face.

'Are you not enjoying the charming journey *en route* for your home and flends?' he asked in his best English. 'Or is it that the desert air disagrees with you, Mr. Stewart?'

Garvin stiffened.

'I assure you, my illustrious friend, that the Nobi air suits me admirably,' he said pleasantly. 'Although perhaps the dust chokes one a little.'

'You have what you call—a thirst?' inquired Chai Yin, speaking as though he were on the best of terms with the Englishman.

Garvin had been given nothing to drink for many long hours and his throat was parched and hot. He would have welcomed a long drink with utmost gratitude. Chai Yin knew this He was deliberately torturing Garvin. But Garvin

did not intend to give him any satisfaction.

'Believe me, no,' he said sweetly. 'I never take much liquid, Chai, and like the camel, I can go many days in the desert without needing water.'

Chai Yin's eyes narrowed.

'That is fortunate, Mr. Stewart,' he said. 'There is not any too much water in our bottles. It is well for Ming Ho and myself that you can do without it.'

Garvin passed a tongue over his dry lips and swallowed hard. He wondered just how long the yellow devil would keep him dry . . . just how long his endurance would last out. He did not want to crawl to the Chinaman's feet and beg for water.

He heard Chai Yin chuckle to himself. Garvin looked at the Chinaman's skinny, yellow throat and wondered if he could possibly throttle the man—squeeze the life out of him as one squeezes the juice out of a lemon—before all his strength was gone.

Chai Yin wanted to break him . . . before he murdered him. Garvin realised that. But he was not broken yet, and it was going to be a question of who died first.

XVII

While Garvin traveled across the Nob. Desert with his captors, Patricia remained locked in her junk, awaiting death.

By now she had given up any lingering hope that Garvin was alive and could return to her. She argued with herself that if he had escaped death in the river he would have been with her by now. So she came to the terrible conclusion that he was dead. She was past weeping. Dry-eyed, almost numbed by her terror, she counted the hours and days to the next full moon.

Her one other hope was Bill. But up till now negotiations with Nyi Hang had proved unsuccessful. He refused to return the white man for his daughter. He still wanted the body of the White Jade. And Silk Moth remained amongst the concubines of Wing Ko, almost as wretched, in her fashion, as Patricia. The little gaudy, painted Silk Moth was being amply punished for her evil ways, in the house of Wing Ko, who was by no means a gentle task-master to his women.

Then, on the tenth day, Patricia's solitude in the junk was broken. She was commanded to the presence of Wing Ko. She was taken to him by two of his servants. She was a rather weak, wan Patricia, once more wearing her blue cotton trousers and coat, which she preferred to the heavy ceremonial robes. Food had been thrust inside her room daily, but she felt too sick and wretched to eat much. She felt deadly sick as she walked to Wing Ko's palace. Her golden hair was long, curling to her shoulders, for it had not been cut since she left Shang Tao. Framed by the heavy mass of that beautiful hair, her face looked very thin and delicate, and there were hollows in her cheeks and under her eyes.

She supposed that Wing Ko was going to tell her that as

Gar-Vin had not returned she must die. But the moment she entered the room wherein Wing Ko sat in state on his lacquered chair her fear turned to hope. Her heart gave a terrific leap. Beside Wing Ko stood the tall figure of Garvin's friend, Bill Trensham ... Bill whom she had never expected to see again.

She gave a cry of joy and stumbled toward him.

'Bill! Bill!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, thank God!'

'Patricia,' he said, giving her both his hands.

They were not strangers now. They were friends united by a common bond of suffering and danger, and they both loved Garvin Stewart, who, in this moment of reunion, was conspicuous by his absence. Patricia's eyes swam with tears as she looked at the boy. He must have had a gruelling time in the hands of Nyi Hung, she thought. The long days of imprisonment in the dank cells under the temple had left their mark on Bill. He stooped slightly; was (so he told her afterwards) almost crippled with rheumatism through exposure to the damp. His face was thin and haggard, and he had grown quite a thick beard. His fair, curling hair was matted and filthy; his eyes looked as though he had seen hell. But he managed to grin at her.

'I never thought I'd see the light of day again, Patricia,' he said. 'Those devils gave me a rotten rest-cure. But apparently Wing Ko managed to break down Nyi Hung's patience. The old horror wanted his daughter back, and gave way last night. We were exchanged outside the city walls this morning, and here I am.'

Pat dashed the tears from her eyes.

'Thank God,' she said again.

'You've had hell, too, I suppose,' he said, clearing his throat. He was more affected than he cared to show by the sight of her haggard, desperate little face.

'Awful,' she said. 'And Garvin ... oh, Bill, do you know?'

'Wing Ko has told me about the storm,' said Trensham gloomily. 'I suppose poor old G. is——?'

'Don't say it,' she interrupted. 'Bill, don't you see what a frightful position I'm in?'

'What, Patricia? I haven't been told much.'

She explained. Wing Ko let them talk, watching them curiously. Now that Tren-Sham had returned, he wondered what the White Jade intended to say

In a few, rapid words Pat told Bill of the ghastly fate impending for her. He blanched as he heard it, and quickly took one of her small, trembling hands.

'My God, the fiends—they mustn't—they shan't burn you alive, Pat.'

'But they will—if Garvin doesn't return by the next full moon.'

'There must be some way out—there must be,' said the boy under his breath. 'Oh, heavens,what can I do to save you!'

'Listen,' she said. 'Supposing I tell Wing Ko that I have received a message from heaven that Garvin is alive and that you, his counsellor, are going to fetch him. Supposing they let you get back to Shang Tao. Then you could bring help . . . rescue me.'

'I couldn't get to Shang Tao and back in time, Pat. There are only three more weeks to the full moon.'

'I must beg for another two weeks' grace,' she said desperately.

'It's your only chance,' Bill muttered. 'If I stay here they'll separate us; I won't even be given a chance to kill you outright, decently. No, my dear, I'd better try and get help from Shang Tao. Where is this old interpreter? We must lay our plans before Wing Ko.'

At that very moment Wing Ko leaned sideways in his chair and struck a big brass gong which was beside him. Bill jumped violently as he heard it, then covered his confusion with a laugh.

'My nerves are all to pieces,' he said. 'My God, Pat, I've heard gongs boom in that damnable temple until I've wanted to howl aloud. If we ever get out of this alive and back to old England, I'll smash every gong I come across, and the Lord help the person who gives me one for a wedding present.'

She tried to laugh with him. They were English, and although they were face to face with the most acute danger—perhaps with a ghastly death—they remained gallant. They joked.

The ancient Chinaman entered the room, and through him Pat spoke bravely to Wing Ko.

'Mazda has communed with me during these last ten days,' she said. 'Mazda has told me, the Lotus-Bride, the imperial wife, that Gar-Vin lives.'

'And where is he?' asked Wing Ko, eyeing her intently.

'Many leagues from here,' said Patricia. 'He has called for Tren-Sham, his friend and counsellor. Together they will return to the river bearing you tidings of joy, O Wing Ko.'

Wing Ko considered this. Then he said:

'What would you that I do, O White Jade?'

Patricia made a desperate bid for life itself. Remembering how Garvin had behaved with these people, she suddenly raised her white arms above her head and chanted to Wing Ko.

'Behold it is written ... Mazda has spoken to the White Jade, the Lotus-Bride, commanding that Tren-Sham shall be given guides and ponies to bear him to Gar-Vin. Six weeks from now, Gar-Vin shall return to claim his imperial bride and to satisfy Wing Ko's people.'

'But it is written that if Gar-Vin does not return by the Full Moon, the White Jade must die,' said Wing Ko.

'No,' said Pat boldly. 'She shall live until the Full Moon has passed and the New Moon appears. Then shall Gar-Vin and Tren-Sham return to Wing Ko.'

Silence. Patricia's heart beat so fast it seemed to choke her. Bill, clasping her hand, leaned forward in breathless anticipation.

Would Wing Ko agree to this? Would he give them the time they so sorely needed ... time to save Pat from a frightful death?

XVIII

The sustained silence threatened to break Pat's nerve. She gritted her teeth and hung on to Bill Trensham's hand. And at last Bill could bear it no longer. Wing Ko's face was a sinister mask, expressing nothing. His attitude was maddeningly non-committal. Bill broke out hoarsely

'Speak, O Wing Ko!'

The old Chinaman translated this appeal into Chinese for Wing Ko. The desert brigand nodded his shaven head once or twice meditatively. Then he said:

'So be it. Let Tren-Sham seek Gar-Vin and return with him here within six weeks from now. Should the New Moon come bringing no word of Gar-Vin, the White Jade must die.'

Pat and Bill exchanged glances. Their hearts beat rapidly with relief. To poor Pat it was an exquisite relief. She had been so afraid that Wing Ko would refuse their petition and that she would be put to death before Bill had any possible chance of finding Garvin—or, at least, if he failed to find Garvin, of securing help for her.

Hand in hand, they knelt before Wing Ko, expressing their gratitude. He received the words of thanks none too graciously. Wing Ko was dissatisfied with life at the moment. He had believed in the divinity of Gar-Vin, and he had been bitterly disappointed by the great storm which had swept the river and swamped the prayer-boats of his people; still more disappointed at the disappearance of Gar-Vin, which he could only attribute to death. He was anxious now to appease the wrath of the Fire God, and the sacrifice of Gar-Vin's Lotus-Bride on the funeral pyre presented itself to his pagan mind as the correct solution to his religious problems.

Yet now the white friend, the counsellor of Gar-Vin, Tren-Sham, who had returned from Kara-Ning, was positive that Gar-Vin lived and that he could find him. This being so, Wing Ko was willing to postpone the death of the White Jade.

Through the ancient interpreter Bill demanded a camel, a baggage-pony, and a guide for his journey through the Nobi Desert. Wing Ko granted the petition. He then rose from his lacquered chair of state and marched from the room, followed by the old Chinaman. Pat was left alone with Bill so that she might make her farewell to him.

She was white and weary after her recent terrible experiences, and, once the Chinamen had departed, she dropped down on to the edge of a dais whereon Wing Ko's chair was placed, and, leaning her arms on the chair, bowed her head upon them.

'Oh, Bill, Bill!' she said in a heart-rending voice. 'We've won so far—but now what are our chances worth?'

Trensham did not answer for a moment. He stood close to the girl, looking down at her compassionately. He was himself weary to death. But he thought only of Patricia She was young, beautiful, helpless, his countrywoman, and she was in a ghastly position; only six weeks stood between her and a hideous death.

Any animosity he had ever felt for the girl who had treated Garvin badly died in this hour. If she had been his own sister or a dearly loved friend, he could not have felt more anxious on her behalf or more sorry for her. He sat down on the dais and put an arm gently around the slender figure in the blue cotton Chinese suit.

'Look here, Pat, don't give way, old thing,' he said awkwardly. 'You can rely on me to do my damnedest to get you out of this frightful mess.'

She turned to him, her hands clasped tightly together in the effort not to cry. She did not want to break down utterly, to be a coward. There was a splendid vein of courage in Patricia Moreland, and when she tried to smile at the boy he thought it the most touching thing he had ever seen.

'I won't give way, Bill,' she said. 'But things look pretty

black. You've got your transport back to civilisation, but will you find Garvin? Will you?'

'That's the question, of course,' said Bill, keeping a brotherly arm around her 'is the poor old chap alive or dead?'

Patricia bit her lower lip so fiercely that she made it bleed.

'I think he's dead, Bill—I think he's dead,' she said in a low, wailing voice. 'He was carried down the river away from me that night in the storm. If he had reached land he would have found his way back to me, somehow.'

'Yes,' said Trensham gloomily, 'I suppose you're right.'

'And, Bill—before we were separated—we—found each other again,' she added in a choked voice. 'We—have always really loved each other. I behaved rottenly to him once, but I asked him to forgive me, and he has forgiven me, Bill.'

The sight of the girl so white, so tired and pinched, so tragic, moved Trensham profoundly To hear her confess her love for Garvin—to realise that they had 'found each other' before the storm separated them—was the most piteous thing, and it broke the gallant, cheery boy whom all the horrors in Kara-Ning had failed to break. He just put his head on Patricia's shoulder and cried like a baby.

'Oh, my God, you poor little thing! .. oh, my God, you poor, poor little thing!' he kept on repeating, with big, gulping sobs.

And then of course Pat turned comforter, put her arms around the boy and told him not to cry for her, that she would be all right, that nothing really mattered since Garvin had at last forgiven her and loved her again.

In the end she gave way and cried with him. They just sat there on the edge of the dais, sobbing in each other's arms, like two lost, bewildered children. Finally Bill released the girl gently, stood up, wiped his eyes on his shirt-sleeves, and pulled himself together He smiled down at her.

'I feel better after that, Pat, old thing, and I'm not ashamed of it—damned if I am! You're about the pluckiest bit of a girl I've ever imagined. Most women would be in hysterics over this.'

She stood up, responding to his smile.

'I'm not an hysterical creature, Bill. But I assure you I'm not looking forward to being burnt alive.'

'You won't be—my God!—you shan't be, Pat.'

'It's a tight position, Bill. You daren't bring back the troops or a lot of people to save me. They'd realise you were fooling them—trapping them—they'd put a knife in my throat before you ever reached my junk.'

'That's what worries me,' he said, a hand to his aching forehead. 'Besides, I may never get back across the Nobi alive. It's a fiendish journey.'

'Garvin is the one person who can save me,' said Pat tragically. 'If Garvin is dead, I shall follow him, Bill.'

The boy gripped both her hands.

'I'm going now, old thing,' he said 'If I can save you, you know I will. If Garvin is alive, I swear by God I'll find him and bring him to you.'

'I know you will,' she said.

Then she added: 'I wish we had a bullet left or a morphia tablet.'

'We haven't either, dear,' he said, shuddering for her. 'Oh, God, I don't know what to do, Pat . . . whether I oughtn't to strangle you now with my bare hands and put you out of your agony before I leave you.'

'Don't do that,' she said. 'While there's life there's hope. You may find—Garvin.'

'Shall I go, Pat?'

'Yes, go,' she said. 'And God be with you.'

'And you, old thing.'

He was reluctant to leave her . . . the poor, gallant, pathetic little girl whom Garvin loved He kissed both her hands and walked out of the room, not daring to look back at her. She did not cry after he had gone. She only stood still where he had left her, her eyes shut, her hands clasped to her breast. A passionate prayer rose from her lips.

'Please, God . . . please let him find Garvin . . . oh, please, *please*!'

She prayed like a child.

After Bill had set out on his camel across the desert, with a Tartar guide and a pony bearing provisions, Wing Ko's men

came and escorted the White Jade back to her junk. As they locked the door on her, she looked forlornly round the room, wherein food and drink had been placed for her. She was terribly alone now that Bill had gone. And she had six weeks to wait—six torturing weeks of doubt, uncertainty, hope, despair—and then, either the beginning or the end of all things for her.

XIX

By the time the Citroën-Kegresse bearing Chai Yin, Ming Ho, and Garvin Stewart across the Nobi Desert came within sight of the first civilised Chinese town, Garvin was very nearly insane.

He had been kept alive by his captors because Chai Yin—afraid that his wound might break out afresh and that he might die of it unless he were properly doctored by the Englishman—dared not let him die. But he was only just kept alive ... given the minimum of food and drink ... reduced to a mere shadow of the fine, stalwart young man who had set out for an adventure in the desert many weeks ago. His body, racked with hunger and tormented by insects, was like a skeleton. Often—just for the exquisite pleasure of seeing him suffer—Chai Yin refused him water until he begged for it. Yes, Garvin had been reduced to begging. It was cruelly hot in the desert and his throat grew parched and dry; his lips cracked with the need of a drink. Chai Yin and Ming Ho took it in turns to sleep. One of them was always watching the Englishman in case he endeavoured to fling himself out of the car or do harm to them.

When the three weeks' journey had almost reached its end, Garvin was in a frightful condition of body and mind.

His brain became cunning—obsessed with one feverish desire—the desire to kill Chai Yin and Ming Ho before they could kill him. For hours he crouched in his corner of the car, famished, tortured with thirst, wild-eyed, watching the two Chinamen ... waiting his time. He believed his hour would come.

It came one moonlit night when Ming Ho stopped the car just ten miles out of Feng Hsi, a small mining town on the fringe of the desert and in touch with civilisation. Ming Ho

had been driving furiously all day and he was spent. He must rest. Chai Yin volunteered to watch Garvin while Ming Ho slept. So Ming Ho curled himself up on his seat and in a few minutes he was snoring like a pig, whilst Chai Yin leaned comfortably back in his corner, smoked, and refreshed himself with a bottle of wine.

Garvin crouched in his own corner and watched . . . his inflamed and desperate eyes narrowed to slits. He moistened his parched lips with a tongue that was sore and swollen. The hellish thirst consuming him threatened to break his manhood. He could have broken down and sobbed—sobbed for a drink.

Chai Yin gave the Englishman an affable smile.

'Enjoy the scenery while you can, my dear fiend,' he said blandly. 'Yonder lies Feng Hsi. But you will never go through the gates. You will be flung to the jackals at dawn to-morrow.'

'Damn you, Chai Yin!' said Garvin, between his teeth. 'We shall see——'

'Would you like a drink?' asked Chai Yin.

'Yes,' said Garvin, breathing hard and fast, his eyes fixed on the bottle in the Chinaman's hand.

Chai Yin poured out a glass, drained it to the dregs, flung away the empty bottle, then chuckled. That evil chuckle sent Garvin quite mad. He suddenly lunged forward, his fingers clawing at Chai Yin's throat.

'Damn you!' he sobbed. '*Damn you!*'

Chai Yin, not expecting the attack, gurgled as the maddened Englishman tightened that grip on his throat. Ming Ho, worn out after the long drive across the desert, snored peacefully, and did not hear the choked cries from his master. Like one possessed, Garvin dug his fingers into Chai Yin's wind-pipe, throttled him with the last remaining ounce of strength in his tormented body. The Chinaman's eyes bulged; his face grew mottled purple; his breath came in little grunting groans. He tried to fight Garvin, but Garvin's strength was the strength of a madman, and he had fastened on to Chai Yin's throat with such force that the yellow man was helpless.

He squirmed and jerked spasmodically in Garvin's hold for a few minutes, then lost consciousness and lay still. As the limp body rolled away from him, Garvin sat back in the car, panting, gasping for breath. His frenzy of strength left him weak and white to the lips. But a fierce exultation gripped him as he looked at Chai Yin's body huddled in the corner of the car. He did not know whether he was dead or not. He only knew that he must be very nearly dead, and that he, Garvin, was revenged at last for the days of hunger, thirst, and torment he had been put through by the merchant.

Now there was Ming Ho to deal with. Easy enough to deal with a snoring pig. Garvin had no sentiment—no Christian or charitable feeling about the squint-eyed yellow beast who had helped to torture him and who had in the first place been responsible for Patricia's outrageous abduction.

Garvin knew that he must kill Ming Ho before Ming Ho could awake and kill him. There was Pat to think of; Pat, who might be alive and in the hands of that pagan tribe back on the Tsi-Fu River. If she lived he must go to her; save her from horrors more frightful than death.

He dared not awaken Ming Ho and challenge him to battle. He was too weak to fight. Ming Ho would overpower him in a moment. It was a decision between Pat and Ming Ho, and the decision was made without one instant's hesitation. Garvin's shaking fingers found and fastened on the dagger on Chai Yin's silk girdle, and then, feet noiseless on the sand, he crept round the car to the slumbering driver and plunged the knife into his heart.

Ming Ho's slanting eyes opened. . . . He gave Garvin one amazed and frightful look . . . then, with a little grunting sound, he died.

After that Garvin lost no more time. He pushed Chai Yin's fat, revolting body out of the car. It rolled over on the sand and lay quiet . . . the mottled face a hideous mask in the bright moonlight. Then Garvin seized one of the bottles of wine which were stored in the car, opened it, and drank down the liquid with great, sobbing gulps. He had never been so damnably thirsty nor so exquisitely glad of a drink in

his life before. He found some dry biscuits and bolted them It was days since the Chinese devils had allowed him proper food. The biscuits and wine refreshed him The colour came to his hollow cheeks, the light of hope into his sunken eyes. Madness passed, leaving him sane and cool ... the old, quick-thinking, purposeful Garvin As the sap of vitality ran through his body again he flung up his head and looked at the shining face of the moon.

'Thank God!' he said aloud. 'Oh, thank God! .. Now I may see Pat again. There is some hope .. '

Having disposed of Chai Yin and Ming Ho, there were many practical things to be done First he made an examination of the provisions in the car, and the petrol. He found plenty of the latter; plenty of oil. He found enough food and drink to carry him back across the Nobi. They were within twenty minutes' drive of Feng Hsi, and just over a fortnight's journey from Wing Ko's settlement

Garvin decided not to waste time by going into Feng Hsi He would take the wheel and turn the car straight back to the place wherein he had last seen Pat alive, and where there was just the slender chance of finding her again.

Before he started, he stripped Chai Yin of the black silk coat, black satin baggy trousers, and scarlet sash which he had been wearing and put them over his terribly tattered dirt-stained garments. He was returning to Wing Ko as Gar-Vin. He had better return in decent clothes, he told himself drily.

He looked a strange, wild being in the Chinese costume. His hair was long, tangled, and he had a thick beard If he had entered the Shang Tao Club, not one of Garvin Stewart's associates would have recognised him. But the light of victory lay in his eyes, and hope filled his being as he set out for the return journey across the desert.

He drove one hundred and fifty miles without pausing. Then, utterly exhausted, he switched off the engine, looked at the clock in the car, saw that it was nearing sunrise, and lay down on the back seat with a cushion under his head and slept. He slept soundly the clock round. When he awoke it was four o'clock in the afternoon and the desert was baking

under a broiling sun. One or two wild turkeys were strutting round the car, looking curiously at the sleeper.

Garvin sat up, rubbed his eyes, and realised that he had slept for twelve long hours. He felt immensely refreshed, and after a glass of water and some tinned tongue and biscuits he was quite himself again. But he reproached himself for having slept like a pig and wasted so much time.

'I must get back to Pat—I must,' he muttered.

He drove on, praying God that the gallant Citroën would not break down. The engine was having a gruelling test.

For long days and nights Garvin drove . . . drove . . . drove, stopping only for a few moments necessary for food and a few hours' sleep. And every day that dawned brought him closer to Wing Ko's settlement. He knew that way . . . God, how well he knew it! . . . remembered the anguish of the journey with the Chinamen. He headed for the Tsi-Fu River with the aid of a compass.

And then the catastrophe happened. The brave car struggled on for ten more days, and on the tenth refused to move. Garvin, his heart sinking, examined the engine. There was a puncture in the float, and the clutch had seized. Impossible things to mend in the middle of the desert without spare parts or proper tools.

Garvin stood by the car and stared at it, wiping the beads of perspiration from his forehead. His eyes were tragic. It was catastrophic. Here he was, stranded in the desert without conveyance of any kind, neither able to get to Wing Ko nor return to Feng Hsi. And he had been so exultant after his victory over Chai Yin and Ming Ho. The disappointment of it was bitter.

He sat down on the footboard of the Citroën and put his head in his hands.

'My God, my luck is out,' he groaned.

He was finished. Futile to attempt to tramp the desert on foot. He was eleven days' car-journey from Wing Ko's settlement. He would expire of exhaustion or hunger and thirst rapidly. In any case, he told himself ironically, it looked as though he would expire. He would have to remain by the car, helpless to mend it, until the provisions were

finished up, then the end would come. The end . . . after all the struggle, the agony, the longing. . . . The thought crushed Garvin completely. He sat there, shoulders bowed, face in his hands. And now if he thought of Pat it was to pray she had died that night in the river. Better a kindly death by drowning than horrors in the hands of the yellow men . . . his poor, lovely, ill-fated Pat!

He thought, too, of his friend, Bill Trensham. Poor old Bill, whom, he supposed, was still in the hands of Nyi Hung.

'We're all thoroughly up against it,' he told himself. 'If ever we do get out of this infernal, God-forsaken country we shall never want to see it again!'

The sun went down. The brilliance of the Chinese night, glittering with stars, white with moonshine, transformed the arid desert into a lake of silver sheen. And moon and stars looked down on the lonely despairing figure of a man still sitting on the running-board of his car, wondering how long of life he had left to him.

XX

When the pale light of the lemon-tinted dawn dispelled the exotic darkness of the short Eastern night, a small cortège came over the desert: the ungainly shape of a camel with a rider, followed by two ponies; one bearing baggage, the other a Tartar guide. The little procession moved swiftly in the direction of Feng Hsi. It came to a full stop by the side of what appeared to be a deserted car.

Bill Trensham, riding the camel, stared down at the car for a moment with startled eyes. He recognised Chai Yin's Citroën-Kegresse. But for a moment he did not recognise the man inside who was crouched on the back seat, face hidden on one curved arm, apparently asleep. The figure in the black silk Chinese costume seemed unfamiliar. Then something about the shape of the head made Trensham's heart miss a beat. He brought his camel to its knees and dismounted, walked swiftly up to the sleeping man, and touched him on the shoulder.

The figure stirred and turned over, muttering something unintelligible. And then Bill saw who it was. The man with the tangled hair and matted beard was Garvin. The joy of finding his friend alive was so enormous that Trensham gave a great shout.

'Garvin ... Garvin, old fellow ... wake up—it's Bill!' he said excitedly.

Garvin opened his eyes, but he did not recognise his friend. His eyes were glazed and unseeing; his cheeks were flushed, his brow burning hot. During the night, in his weakened, emaciated condition, Garvin had contracted fever. He was delirious. He poured out a jumble of words. And Trensham stood staring at him in dismay, realising that he was seriously ill. He had found Garvin ... but a Garvin more dead than alive.

'My Lord!' muttered Trensham. 'Now what can I do?'

He saw at once that Garvin was too ill to be taken to Wing Ko. The fever must be combated first of all. The only thing to do was to nurse him, here in the car in the best way he could.

Trensham was tired and weak himself, but he had no thought in his brain but to save Garvin and get him back to Pat. He knew only too well the deadly danger facing poor Pat. Oh, the pity of it! To have found Garvin, and in this condition—a Garvin incapable of understanding anything he, Trensham, could tell him about Pat.

Bill set to work swiftly to look after his friend.

The Tartar guide, responding to orders from Bill—spoken in the only few words of Chinese that Bill knew—unstrapped some of the provisions from the baggage pony, while Bill rummaged in the car and found what he needed there. He did not pause to wonder how Garvin had got hold of Chai Yin's car or where the Chinaman could be. His entire thoughts were concentrated on Garvin. Garvin must not be allowed to die, Pat's very life hung on a thread . . and if Garvin did not recover, that thread would snap.

He put Garvin as comfortably as possible on the back seat of the car with a cushion under his head, then, with a bottle of water and a sponge, bathed the poor burning forehead and moistened the cracked, dry lips. Stirring a stiff dose of quinine into a mug of water, he forced it down Garvin's throat. Garvin went on babbling and gesticulating. It was pathetic to listen to him, to watch him. Trensham's heart ached for his friend as he stood over him, anxiously watching. The name 'Pat' was constantly on Garvin's lips.

'Pat, I must get to you. . . Pat, oh, my darling, forgive me . . . Pat . . . Pat . . . where are you?' And then he would change his tone, curse Chai Yin and Ming Ho . . . beg piteously for a drink . . . for food. Trensham guessed that his friend had been through hell since they had last seen each other, and that somehow or other after the storm on the river he had got into the hands of the merchant from Shang Tao.

All that day Bill watched over his friend . . . constantly bathing him to bring down the fever; dosing him; praying, as Bill had not prayed since he was a child, that Garvin would recover. He was haunted by the memory of that brave girl

back at Wing Ko's settlement, to whom Garvin's recovery meant so much.

His patience and devotion were rewarded. By sun-down that day the fever that racked Garvin's body abated and consciousness returned to him.

He opened sore eyes to find a big fellow with a long fair beard sitting beside him. For a moment he did not know where he was or who was with him. Then he looked into Bill's blue eyes and gave a weak cry.

'Bill! ... great sakes! ... it's old Bill!'

'Garvin, old man!' said Trensham, taking his hand. He felt that he could have blubbed like a child. 'Thank the Lord you're all right again.'

'Have I ... been ill?'

'Raving, my dear old fellow. The fever's got you. But you'll be all right now.'

Garvin stared around him, then back at Bill.

'I remember now. My God ... and where have you come from?'

'Wing Ko——'

Garvin raised himself on one elbow and clutched Trensham's arm.

'Wing Ko? Then you got out of Kara-Ning. And Pat ... oh, my God, tell me quickly, have you see Pat?'

'Yes, she is alive and well,' said Trensham.

A look of supreme happiness transfigured Garvin's haggard face.

'Heaven be praised, Bill! Oh, my God, I feel a thousand years younger.'

'I understand, old man,' said Trensham gently. 'But I'm afraid I'm going to spoil your pleasure. Pat is in terrible danger. You've got to pull yourself together and get back to the river as soon as possible.'

'Why? What ... tell me everything?'

Bill told him. When Garvin knew what was facing Pat he felt sick with horror. He shook from head to foot.

'The fiends ... the yellow fiends!' he panted. 'Bill, help me on to your camel. This damned car's bust. I must get on to the camel—go at once.'

'My dear old chap, you're not fit ... you'd expire on the

way . . . you must wait and get up a bit of strength.'

'*Wait?*' said Garvin. 'I daren't wait. You say they're going to kill her if I'm not back by the new moon——'

'We've time, Garvin. Over four weeks, fortunately.'

'But Wing Ko might change his mind—shorten the time.'

'It's on the cards, but you can't travel to-day, anyhow.'

'I can,' said Garvin. 'I will.'

He pushed Trensham aside and staggered on to his feet. But the fever had sapped all his vitality, and the desert spun round him as he tried to step out of the car. He fell back on the car, fainting.

XXI

In the lacquered room of Wing Ko's junk, Patricia waited to be taken to her death.

The weeks had gone by bringing no sign of Garvin . . . no word from Bill Trensham since his departure across the Nobi Desert. The appointed time had passed. To-morrow was the dawn of the New Moon. To-morrow, at sunrise, the White Jade was to be placed on a funeral pyre.

It was midnight—a dark, ghostly night without stars or moon. A little wind ruffled the green waters of the river and the junk rocked monotonously. An eerie night . . . and a lonely, terrified girl crouched on the cushions in the centre of the room, her hands convulsively clasped, her eyes large and haunted in her thin, white face.

Garvin had not come . . . Bill had not come back . . . it was the end of all things for her. She was brave . . . gallant . . . trying to nerve herself to face the frightful ordeal in front of her. But when she pictured the shrieking, capering crowd and that hot fire her fine courage failed.

It was the longest night of her whole life. She grew colder; more numb with terror as every hour dragged by. The moaning of the wind around the junk sounded to her like the wail of a lost soul.

Her pale lips formed the name of the man she loved.

'Garvin . . . Garvin!'

She could only hope that when the agony and suffering was over she would slip into that Valley of the Shadows and find her lover waiting for her.

The first ray of morning light slanted through the junk windows and illuminated the bowed, golden head of the unhappy girl. Simultaneously came the muffled sound of a beaten gong from the distance. Boom! . . . boom! . . . boom!

To Patricia it was like the knell of doom . . . her doom. And then a cry arose as from a thousand throats . . . a cry that seemed to freeze the very marrow in her bones

'White Jade! . . . White Jade!'

Wing Ko's people were calling her to her death.

'White Jade! White Jade!'

The name, issuing from so many throats, was uttered in Chinese. But Patricia had heard it so often since her exile in the Nobi Desert she recognised it now. She remained crouched on the floor of the junk.

She kept on saying under her breath.

'Garvin . . come Garvin . come . . don't let them get me!'

The gong reverberated boom! . boom! . . boom! The cries intensified.

'White Jade! White Jade!'

In sudden, awful panic Patricia staggered on to her feet and stumbling across the little lacquered room, drew aside the orange curtains of the window, and peered out A terrifying spectacle met her gaze. A mob of yellow men and women were surging toward her junk, most of them carrying lighted joss-sticks. The sickly scent from the slender, smoking candles penetrated into Patricia's room—gave her a feeling of deadly nausea. That smell was so typically Oriental. To her everything Oriental had become the very essence of horror . . . of vice, cruelty, pagan barbarity.

Wing Ko's people surged nearer and nearer the junk. Leading them, Wing Ko and his suite rode their black ponies They were all in black robes, and to-day their faces were not painted. They seemed all the more horrible for that . . lean, yellow masks with eyes like slits, ghastly shaven skulls. They might have been Death-heads in the pale light of the dawn. Patricia's heart beat so wildly with terror that she nearly fainted. But she clung on to the window-sill, fighting for breath; praying agonisedly that she would not 'lose face,' as the Chinese called it, by showing her fear. The Chinese as a race were marvellously brave; could bear physical pain with splendid fortitude Patricia did not want them to say that a white woman could not bear pain. It was a frightful

ordeal; but she nerved herself to face the worst, and by the time Wing Ko's people had reached her junk she was not even trembling. She had passed one stage of fright and reached another. She was numbed now; almost beyond feeling.

The dawn had come. The dawn of the New Moon. The Lotus-Bride of Gar-Vin, who was dead, must join her imperial spouse on the funeral pyre.

The door of Patricia's room was unlocked. Two short rather fat Chinese women waddled in, one bearing an armful of clothes. They were concubines of Wing Ko, and they had come to robe the Lotus-Bride for her death.

Motionless, eyes unnaturally large and bright in her white face, Patricia stood in the middle of the room and made no resistance when the women began to take off her blue cotton suit. They chatted shrilly. She did not understand; did not attempt to speak. She felt sick under the touch of their fat, yellow fingers; under the inquisitive stare of their beady eyes. She was quite aware that they were enormously interested in her; proud that they had been chosen to garb her for her 'honourable end.' Was she not the imperial bride of Mazda's ambassador, who had perished in Mazda's storm?

They clothed Patricia in purest white from head to foot; soft white satin trousers; a long white satin coat on which the sacred dragon was embroidered exquisitely in silver thread. They twined white flowers in her golden hair; put white slippers on her feet. By the time they had finished with her she might have been carved out of snow—so cold, so white she was; cheeks and lips no less pale than the blossoms they put in her hair.

Like one in a trance she was led out by the two horrible old women—out of the junk which had at least spelt peace and security to her—to the blood-thirsty, waiting crowd. Through half-shut eyes she saw a sea of hideous yellow faces ... the skeleton-like figure of Wing Ko on his black horse. Wing Ko licked his lips appreciately when he regarded the beautiful white figure standing mutely before him. He had waited too long for the sacrifice, he told himself. Gar-Vin was dead, and Mazda's wrath would remain unappeased

until the Lotus-Bride were consumed to ashes on the sacred pyre.

He turned to the mob.

'Behold the White Jade!' he said

A great cry went up from a thousand throats.

'The White Jade! . . . the White Jade!'

Patricia neither moved nor flinched. Once before she had heard the mob crying for her blood, in the Temple of the Siberian Tiger God at Kara-Ning. Then she had been perilously close to death, but Garvin had saved her This time there was no Garvin and she would not be saved.

She was placed in a gilt chair on two long poles and hoisted on to the shoulders of four Chinamen with long pigtails, young priests in stiff white robes from Wing Ko's palace, wherein Mazda the God of Fire was worshipped. A young Chinese girl, not more than fifteen or sixteen, with only a few twined flowers about her bare, golden limbs, walked in front of Patricia's chair, bearing a bowl above her head. Something—Patricia neither knew nor cared what it was—burned brightly in this bowl, significant of the Fire God. And now the people had ceased shouting and a low chant began . . the funeral chant for Gar-Vin and his Lotus-Bride.

Beside Wing Ko rode an old Chinaman in jewelled vestments, chanting in a cracked, quavering voice and keeping an eager eye upon Patricia. He was the oldest priest in the settlement, and it was he who would offer up the body of the White Jade to Mazda.

Patricia sat stiff and motionless. From her swaying chair she could look down and see everything . . yet saw nothing. She was like one numb and blind

The dawn was passing into morning. The full light of the sun streamed down from the serene blue sky. The river—emerald, flecked with gold—rippled smoothly on its way. All so beautiful, so picturesque; the junks rocking gently on the water.

Now Patricia's glazed eyes glimpsed the dreaded funeral pyre, which had been erected in the open desert, close to Wing Ko's state dwelling.

The pyre was well over ten feet high and burning brilliantly, great red tongues of flame shooting up into the air. It was being stoked by young Chinese priests—novices with pigtails still unshorn.

The sight of this enormous conflagration was sufficient to strike chill horror into the stoutest heart. But Patricia was past normal feeling. As though in a nightmare, she gazed, wide-eyed, open-mouthed, at the pyre, and could not believe that she was to be thrown upon it.

The mob surged round the pyre, keeping their distance, however. The old priest dismounted and exchanged a few words, gravely, with Wing Ko, who nodded and answered him.

Patricia's chair was lowered to the ground. The old priest came toward her and helped her on to her feet. For a moment she stood there, swaying a little; ice-cold in spite of her heavy satin robes and the warmth of the sun, which was mounting higher, ever higher, in the heavens.

Fresh fuel was thrown on to the pyre. It blazed merrily. A slight breeze fanned the flames in the girl's direction. She felt the scorching heat of it against her cheeks. That wave of heat seemed to galvanise her into active terror. She suddenly flung up her arms and gave a long, wailing cry.

'Gar-vin! . . . oh, Gar-vin!'

The cry, poignant with terror and anguish, echoed and re-echoed. A dead silence fell upon the mob waiting for the sacrifice. It seemed almost as though they were waiting—half afraid, in their dull-witted superstitious fashion, lest a voice should answer that cry.

Wing Ko stirred uneasily in his saddle.

'Gar-Vin is dead,' he muttered. 'It is written that the Lotus-Bride must also die.'

Then suddenly, breaking the tense silence with shattering sound, the name of Mazda's ambassador burst from the throats of the populace.

'Gar-Vin! Gar-Vin!'

Wing Ko swung round on his saddle. He saw a solitary horseman galloping over the desert sands waving a hand wildly above his head. As the horseman drew nearer, Wing-

Ko, in profound astonishment, saw that he was indeed Gar-Vin, the lost—Gar-Vin who had died. The white man reached the fringe of the crowd, flung himself out of the saddle, and rushed toward the funeral pyre, beside which a slender figure in white stood swaying. The crowd, mystified by his sudden reappearance and excited by what they imagined must be a miracle, parted to let him through.

The next moment Garvin had reached Patricia's side. He put an arm about her. He flung up the hand bearing his sacred ring.

'Behold Gar-Vin has answered the call of his imperial bride,' he said in a ringing voice. 'Gar-Vin, who had died, lives again with the new life infused into him by the breath of Mazda!'

The crowd watched and listened breathlessly. Not a sound broke the silence, except the crackling of the flames which had been hungrily awaiting the White Jade. Wing Ko stared down at Garvin's figure in speechless astonishment. Patricia had given Garvin only one swift look of unutterable joy and relief, then she had passed beyond emotion of any kind, and fainted. She would have slid through his arms on to the ground, but he picked her up and stood there with her held against his breast, his heart aching for the pitiful lightness of her. She was terribly thin and white and worn. He had felt sick with horror and indignation when, riding across the desert for dear life itself, he had come within sight of that slim figure in the white satin robes beside the ghastly pyre.

He was none too sure of having saved her now. But he made a desperate bid for both their lives. Flinging back his head, he addressed Wing Ko and the startled crowd in eloquent Chinese.

'Behold the wrath and fury of Mazda would have swept ye off the face of the earth like maggots had ye done to death the sacred body of the White Jade who is Gar-Vin's bride. It is well that ye have been prevented from committing this awful crime.'

Wing Ko spoke, uneasily, huskily:

'Lo, Gar-Vin, we thought you dead. Where have you been this long while?'

'In direct commune with Mazda the Mighty,' said Garvin in a sonorous voice. 'My spirit has been with his spirit. His divine voice has given me counsel. Mine eyes through his have looked down in disdain upon the ignorance of the little people who would desecrate the White Jade with their foul touch.'

Wing Ko licked his lips. Superstitious to the bone, pagan and stupid, he was gradually being reduced to a jelly by Garvin's awful words.

'Lo, Gar-vin,' he stuttered, 'we did not know. We thought that you had gone to Mazda the Mighty, and that it was well the White Jade should burn upon your funeral pyre.'

'Fools!' thundered the voice of Garvin, his eyes flashing, his arms drawing Pat closer to him. 'Did she not tell you I would return? Did not Tren-Sham, my friend and counsellor, tell you that I lived? Behold my body, which has lain under the river, has risen again, and I am sent to warn you of your folly and bid you cleanse yourselves of sin, lest Mazda strike more terribly than he struck on the night of the *buran*.'

These ominous words finished Wing Ko. He slid from his horse and prostrated himself on the ground before the white man. That Gar-Vin was reincarnated through the magic of Mazda seemed an awe-inspiring and indisputable fact. Wing Ko sent up a wail for pardon.

'Forgive us, O illustrious one! Oh Born-before-me, forgive ... have mercy on my people ... intercede for us!'

The whole crowd followed the leader's example. Men, women, children, priests—with one accord they bowed in the dust, moaning, supplicating.

'A miracle ... a miracle! ... Gar-vin is reincarnated and has come back to intercede for Wing Ko's people,' said the old priests in a high, shrill voice.

'Mercy on us, O Gar-Vin!' wailed the mob.

It was the supreme triumph of Garvin's life. He stood there, panting, eyes closed, heart palpitating with sheer, exquisite relief. He had been so terribly afraid that he would not be in time ... that even if he reached Pat in time the people might still demand her death.

But he had won the day. He knew that he had the

grovelling Wing Ko at his feet for the rest of time.

Pat stirred and opened her eyes. For an instant she was too dazed to know where she was or what had happened. Then she looked up and saw Garvin's dear, familiar face ... He looked as though he were ill, wasted by fever ... but it was Garvin all the same, and he smiled down at her—one of the old, cheery, encouraging smiles she remembered

'Pat,' he whispered. 'Oh, my dear, thank God!'

She clung to him . . clung and clung .. wild, hysterical joy shaking her.

'Garvin, Garvin, oh, Garvin!' was all she could say, with the tears raining down her cheeks.

Garvin looked down at the kneeling crowd.

'I will converse with you later, O Wing Ko,' he said in a slightly disdainful voice to the crouching desert chief. 'I am wearied now of this mob, and would seek rest and food with my imperial bride. Take us to our dwelling'

His orders were obeyed with surprising promptness. While the awe-stricken priests quenched the flames of the funeral pyre, Garvin and Patricia were carried in a litter to their junk. Pat, hearing the sizzle of the water on the fire, shuddered and held on to Garvin with both small, trembling hands.

'They would have burned me, Garvin . they would have burned me if you hadn't come!' she kept repeating in her hysteria of joy.

In the litter, carried by four young priests, Garvin held her close to his side. He buried his face against her hair, sweet with the scent of the flowers. He could only say:

'My darling, my poor, poor darling, thank God!'

XXII

Garvin and Patricia were alone in their junk. The seething mob had dispersed, and were celebrating the miraculous return of Gar-Vin in their own pagan way. Shouts and cries filled the air; crackers were let off; many voices and lutes made the morning glad with song.

An hour ago a cruel, blood-thirsty crowd had howled for the White Jade's death. This was the turn of the tide—reaction.

In the little lacquered room of the junk, which spelt peace and safety now, Garvin sat on a low, carved stool. Pat was curled up at his feet. His arms were about her shoulder; hers around his knees. He was making her eat some rice-cakes and drink some of the weak yellow wine which had been brought to them by awe-stricken, respectful serving-women. He saw to it that she ate and drank, for he was horrified at her appearance.

'You look as though you had been terribly ill, my poor Pat,' he murmured, stroking her golden hair. 'Oh, poor little girl! Thank God I got to you in time.'

'Thank God you did, Garvin.'

She finished her meal and sat in supreme contentment; one thin, flushed cheek against his hand. She was so happy in that hour that she could scarcely speak. Garvin had returned to her and she was with him. She knew now beyond a doubt that he loved her; that they adored each other. They could pick up the lost thread of their love where it had snapped that ghastly night of the storm.

He was exquisitely tender and gentle with her. Indeed they were both too tired, too exhausted for passion. They had been through terrible times, and they only wanted peace now—each other. To sit thus, with clinging arms and hands

and eyes drinking in the sight of each other's faces, was the most perfect thing that life could offer them.

Later Garvin told Patricia all that had happened since the storm had swept him out of the barge down the river and he had fallen into the hands of Chai Yin. When she heard how nearly he had died she shuddered, and clung to him more closely, covering his hand with kisses, bathing it in her tears.

'My dear, oh, my dear lover!'

He caressed her hair, and went on with his story. She learned how the car had broken down and how Bill Trensham had come across him when he was dying of fever.

'Good old Bill saved my life that time,' said Garvin. 'Nursed me devotedly all these weeks. I nearly pegged out—I was so infernally weak. And I'm pretty sure the only thing that saved me was the will to live. Bill told me about your danger and I kept on saying to myself, "I must get to Pat. I must get to Pat."'

'Oh, Garvin!' exclaimed Pat, her great eyes fixed on him. 'Go on.'

'The fever had such a grip of me it took me weeks to get strong enough to mount a horse,' he said. 'I was nearer this place than Bill was from the other side of the desert, so finally, when I was well enough, we decided that he should take the camel and the guide and go on to Feng Hsi, then to Shang Tao, and get help for us both. I took one of the baggage-ponies and some provisions and rode back here as fast as I could go. I'm afraid I killed the poor brute of a horse. The Tartar guide came with me as far as the settlement. He knew of several secret oases where I could rest and water my horse. When I got within sight of this place, he turned back to rejoin Bill in case *he* lost his bearings. These Tartar guides are marvels . . . they know every inch of the Nobi. Oh, my dear, when I saw you standing there by that ghastly fire . . you little white, suffering thing . . .'

'Don't!' she broke in, shaking from head to foot. 'Don't dwell on that now. It's all right now.'

He gathered her right up into his arms and hugged her convulsively, crushing her white satin embroidered coat; covering her golden head with kisses. She returned the kisses more passionately now.

'You've suffered too, my poor Garvin. We've both had a dreadful, dreadful time. And now what's going to happen to us?'

'Now all we can hope for is that Bill will get help for us and we will eventually get back to civilisation, darling. Neither of us want to remain in China.'

'Indeed we don't,' she shuddered. 'But we seem safe with Wing Ko.'

'Yes,' he nodded grimly. 'But just how long our safety and peace will last, heaven knows. This is such a devilish country. Somehow I feel we haven't finished with the wrath and vengeance of Nyi Hung yet. But don't let us contemplate disasters. We are together, you and I. . . . Oh, my darling!'

'Oh, my lover,' she said. 'Tell me again you love me—that you'll forgive me for the rotten way I treated you in England. I must have been mad . . . for I loved you all the time. I only wanted freedom . . . wanted to pander to my horrid vanity and get lots of admiration from other men. It was beastly of me. I know better now, Garvin. . . . I'm not a stupid, proud girl any more. Oh, please forgive me.'

Garvin cupped her face between his hands and looked down into her eyes.

'My dear,' he whispered, 'I could forgive you anything on earth. After all you, too, have something to forgive me. When I met you again at Shang Tao I almost hated you—I felt cruel, vindictive. When I got you here, I was a brute. Don't I remember it, to my shame? We must forgive each other, dearest, and nothing matters much now that we've fallen in love all over again . . . and so madly, Pat . . . so madly!'

Her arms went round his neck. He held her close, his lips on her mouth. Her eyes closed, and for a moment in that little sunlit lacquered room of the gently rocking junk there was heaven itself. Passion, ecstasy, the joy of reunion, the assuaging of all agony and worry, were mixed into a nectar of which they drank thirstily, lingeringly . . . locked in each other's arms. At last Garvin raised his head and drew a deep breath.

'My dear!' he said. 'My White Jade!'

'Oh, my Gar-Vin! . . . my Illustrious One!' The corners of

her mouth trembled, dimpled into a smile . . . the first for so many long, weary days and weeks.

'You must marry me, beloved,' he said. 'If we are doomed to stay out here in this pagan spot for many more months . . . if poor old Bill doesn't get help for us . . . we shall have to accept the religious rites of Wing Ko's priest and let him marry us. We can say we have had one bridal in Mazda's heavenly court and that we want another on the Tsi-Fu River.'

Her heart beat tempestuously against his. She was one burning blush now; no longer the maiden of snow and ice who had been led to her death, but a warm, human, passionate girl in the arms of her lover.

'I love you, Garvin. . . . Oh, I shall die if we are ever separated again,' she whispered.

'God grant there is no more trouble ahead, my dear one,' he said.

He kissed her twice on the lips and the eyes, then rose and began to pace up and down the little room. Pat watched him wistfully. How dear he was to her now; how dear. He looked so strange in that black satin Chinese suit which had belonged to Chai Yin; his face was thin, wasted by fever; his brown hair roughly shorn by Bill in the desert; his chin very roughly shaven Yet to Pat he was far more wonderful than he had ever been. She was on fire with love for him . . . and coupled with that flame was the natural fear that runs alongside love in the hearts of all women—the fear of losing him now she had grown to care so much.

That day, at least, they knew peace and happiness. Nobody disturbed them. There was not one among Wing Ko's pagan crowd who would have dared disturb the rest of the ambassador whom Mazda had miraculously restored to his people.

But that night when the velvet veil of darkness hung over Wing Ko's settlement and the sky became a blaze of glittering stars, and the slender new moon, which was to have looked down upon Patricia's death, rose like an ivory crescent over the river, fresh trouble came—the disaster which, somehow, ever since his return, Garvin had feared.

Garvin and Pat were sitting by the open window of their junk looking at the dark green, quietly flowing river whispering their new-found love and passion to the stars when they first became aware of a commotion in the settlement, of trouble that fell like a foul, black shadow across their peace.

First of all there came a scream—a man's hoarse scream wrung from the depths of sudden agony. That cry broke the serene silence of the night and made Patricia blanch and cling to her lover.

'Oh, God, what was that, Garvin?'

'I don't know, dear,' he said. 'It may be nothing.'

But it was something . . . and suddenly there came a rain of blows on the door of the junk. Pat and Garvin sprang to their feet. Garvin opened the door. A young Chinaman from the private court of Wing Ko rushed in, remarkably perturbed and green about the gills for one belonging to a race usually impassive, showing no emotion.

He broke into a torrent of staccato Chinese, gesticulating with his thin, lemon-coloured hands. Garvin listened, then turned to Pat. She read disaster in his eyes even before he translated what the boy had said.

'My God, Pat, we're up against it again. Just a few hours of peace, my dear. Now this——'

'What ... tell me quickly!'

'What I feared,' he said. 'Nyi Hung, the high priest of Kara-Ning. His vengeance is about to fall on us. He has been quietly preparing for it all these weeks, obviously; training his men for battle. He exchanged poor old Bill for his daughter, Silk Moth, quietly enough. But he didn't intend to let matters rest there. Apparently Silk Moth was insulted by Wing Ko while she was living in his house, and Nyi Hung has come to avenge her dishonour and—my poor darling, try not to be frightened—to get you back. His people still cry for the White Jade who was stolen from the Jade Tomb.'

Patricia gave Garvin her hand, and he grasped it tightly. She tried to smile at him.

'I'm not really surprised . . . and so long as I have you, I'll try not to be frightened, Garvin.'

'It's worse than that, though, darling,' he said bluntly.

'That cry you heard just now came from one of the guards from the court when he was assassinated. Nyi Hung and hundreds of his men have surrounded the settlement . . . stolen across the desert without making a sound . . . surprised everybody. Wing Ko . . . is already dead.'

'Oh, heavens!' she said, trembling. 'Dead?'

'Yes, murdered. This boy says he lies in his state chair with a poisoned knife in his throat. The vengeance of Nyi Hung has reached him. Listen.'

With bated breath, her hand clinging to his, Pat listened. The night was full of sound now; of women's cries, of men's hoarse shouting; of galloping hoofs. A battle was in progress outside this junk. Yellow men, mad with blood-lust and longing to settle an ancient feud, were at each other's throats.

For years the men of Kara-Ning had resented the many foul murders and robberies perpetrated in the desert by Wing Ko. And now Nyi Hung, turned from priest to soldier, had led them forth to open warfare.

'Have you a weapon on you?' Garvin said to the panting, wild-eyed Chinese boy.

'Yes, Illustrious One. This dagger.'

'Give it to me,' said Garvin.

The boy gave him the dagger. Garvin grasped it, then turned to Patricia.

'It's futile for me to go out into that howling crowd,' he said, putting an arm about her shoulders. 'We'll have to wait here . . . and when we get a chance, slip away. If they find us, well, it's all up this time, Pat.'

'Don't let them get me again—that's all I ask,' she said, clinging to him desperately.

The young Chinaman, eager to serve Gar-Vin, plucked at his sleeve.

'Master, O Gar-Vin the Honourable, I think I know a way out for you.'

Garvin listened to him eagerly, then tightened his clasp of Pat.

'He says a boat, darling, alongside the junk; that we might get into it and slip away down the river under cover of dark

while the fighting is going on. We may possibly pull it off.'

'Where is the boat?'

'Moored just outside now. This boy—Nang Po—will help us.'

'Hurry, then,' said Pat in an agony of impatience. 'Oh, Garvin, hurry—we must not get into the hands of Nyi Hung again!'

XXIII

Garvin spoke rapidly to Nang Po, who nodded, then cautiously opened the door of the junk and peered out. He then turned to the white man and girl, who were clinging to each other's hands.

'The way is clear, O Honourable Master,' he whispered. 'Come!'

'Come on, darling,' said Garvin, putting an arm round Patricia's waist. 'We'll make a dash for it, anyhow.'

'I'm not afraid—with you,' was her reply.

For an instant his gaze rested on her in speechless love and admiration. She was so very gallant, so very sweet and plucky; any man would have adored her. How utterly she had wiped out the past, he thought! The thoughtless, frivolous girl he had known in England had become a fearless, splendid woman. He loved her . . . would give everything he owned on earth to know her safe now; thousands of miles away from the Tsi-Fu River and the Chinese devils who came swarming like noxious yellow insects over the arid desert.

Outside the junk, confusion reigned in the night. But nobody at that moment was worrying about Gar-Vin and his White Jade. The news that Wing Ko, chief of the desert thieves, was dead had circulated like wildfire through the settlement, and his men were stricken with terror and dismay. Men and women scuttled hither and thither, trying to defend themselves with sticks and stones and knives against the onslaught of Nyi Hung's soldiers. The enemy had set fire to several of the junks, and Wing Ko's palatial residence was ablaze. Scarlet flames shot up into the air, shedding a lurid and sinister glow over the settlement.

In every hole and corner men fought hand to hand, with

bared teeth and knives. The confusion was indescribable. Patricia's fingers tightened about Garvin's as she listened and looked about her. On the river several small junks were burning merrily.

Nang Po led them to a small raft-shaped boat which was moored to the bank. Garvin helped the girl on to it. Nang Po then handed Garvin a long pole.

'If you can go down the river with the current you may escape Nyi Hung and his men,' he said, looking at Garvin with rather pathetic slanting eyes. 'No, Illustrious One, I may not come with you. The raft will not hold more than two. Farewell.'

'Farewell, Nang Po, and Mazda shall reward you,' said Garvin solemnly, knowing how his words would please the young fire worshipper.

Patricia crouched on the raft, knees huddled up, her arms around them, whilst Garvin pushed away from shore with his long pole as though he were punting on a peaceful English river. Her heart beat fast and anxiously. At any moment some dark, sinister shape might spring from the shadows and stop their progress.

Nang Po stood on the river-bank watching the raft drift slowly down the river. His yellow face bore a beatific expression. He was a pagan, and he believed in Gar-Vin, who had miraculously come back from the dead to preserve the life of the Lotus-Bride. He also believed he and his family would be rewarded by Mazda for the service he rendered Gar-Vin to-night.

But suddenly the happy expression on his face changed to one of surprise and terror. A skinny hand had grasped his throat. Someone had sprung upon him from behind. Nang Po never spoke again. Only a little grunting noise escaped his lips as the life was deftly throttled out of him. Then his eyes closed for ever in the last long sleep. A pair of strong arms lifted his body (so pathetically limp and still in its blue cotton suit) and flung it into the river. An ever-widening circle on the moonlit water was all that was left to show the burial place of Nang Po.

The Chinaman who had murdered him was a certain

Chang Li, of Nyi Hung's bodyguard. He had crept up behind Garvin's junk on his stomach and lain flat and motionless whilst he witnessed the escape of the white man and the famous White Jade for whom the god of Kara-Ning clamoured.

As soon as he had thrown the lifeless body of Nang Po from him, he turned and ran to a well-guarded portion of the settlement, where the high priest of Kara-Ning, in ancient Chinese armour—steel breast-plate and hat complete—awaited his spy.

'Greetings, O Nyi Hung,' said Chang Li, grinning broadly. 'I have delectable news for your honourable ears.'

'Speak,' said Nyi Hung.

'The White Jade and Gar-Vin are even now escaping down the river on a raft and can be easily overtaken.'

Nyi Hung drew a hissing breath of joy.

'It is well, Chang Li,' he said. 'The day is ours. We have had a complete victory. Wing Ko's men are surrendering right and left; many lie dead, and the women are taken for slaves. Now it but remains for us to return the body of the White Jade to the god from whom she was snatched.'

Down the river on their raft, the lovers glided serenely, unconscious of their danger. They had grown more confident as they left the burning settlement behind them Surely nobody would deter them now. Garvin had it in his mind to direct the raft toward shore at the spot where he knew the disused fisherman's hut stood . . . that same hut in which he had been Chai Yin's prisoner for so many weary days. There they could take shelter for the moment.

He dipped the pole into the water, and looked an instant down at the girl who crouched at his feet; a slim, white shape still in her gorgeous ivory satin robes; her face pale and pure in the brilliant moonlight. A wave of passionate tenderness rushed over him He suddenly stooped and kissed her on the lips.

'Oh, my dear, my Lovely One, I hope to God for your sake there is no more trouble ahead,' he said.

'Darling Garvin,' she began. But even as she looked up at him with a sweet smile, the smile froze on her lips and

changed to a look of horror. 'Oh, my God, look!' she added under her breath.

Garvin looked. He saw a dozen or more men swimming rapidly up to the raft. Their black round heads bobbed up and down in the water. Thin yellow arms stroked swiftly through the water. And the next instant the raft was surrounded by half-naked, grinning Chinamen, whose wet coarse pigtails flapped down their glistening backs. There were knives between their bared teeth.

Pat flung her hands up to her face with a low moan of fear.

'Oh, Garvin ... Garvin ... we're done for!'

'Not yet,' he said. Lifting the pole, he brought it down with a sickening thud on the head nearest him. It disappeared with a gurgling sound. He struck another, desperately ... but two or three of the Chinamen climbed on to the raft. Garvin was one against fourteen and his position was hopeless from the start. The raft rocked perilously as he tried to fight against the skinny hands that clutched him, but in less than a minute the pole had been wrenched from his fingers and his arms tied behind him. He was forced down on to his knees. One of the Chinamen took charge of the raft and began to steer it in to shore. An evil-looking Chinese tied Patricia's hands behind her. She looked at her lover in despair.

'These are Nyi Hung's men,' she whispered.

'Yes, my dear ... it's frightfully bad luck,' he said, panting after the exertion of his struggle with the men. 'Oh, Pat, Pat, my blood runs cold at the thought that I'm helpless to protect you now.'

Her own blood was running cold. They were near the river-bank now, and she saw the formidable figure of the high priest of Kara-Ning standing on the shore, awaiting her. But she was still brave. She gave Garvin a look that he never forgot.

'I can die more happily now that I've known one day of love with you, Garvin,' she said.

'God bless you, darling,' he said huskily. 'I simply worship you. To-day has been heaven for me, too. But I wanted there to be so many more days for us, Pat.'

Tears blinded her eyes. She would have spoken to him

again, but she was given no more opportunity The Chinamen lifted her out of the raft on to the shore and she stood face to face with Nyi Hung She looked proudly up at the skeleton-like, terrible face of the Bonze whom she had hoped never to see again He spat a few words at her. She did not understand; only stood with her golden head erect, her lips compressed. But Garvin, a few yards away from her, in the hands of two strong Chinamen, heard and trembled for her.

'Welcome, O White Jade,' Nyi Hung had said 'This time the Tiger God shall not be cheated. To-morrow when the sun is in the mid-heavens there shall be a great sacrifice, and you and the white man shall feed the sacred and hungry jaws of the deity.'

Then he looked at Garvin. A ferocious smile widened his thick, wide lips.

'Greetings to you, O Gar-Vin,' he added. 'This time you shall not administer death to the White Jade .. death shall be administered to *you*.'

'Beware how you deal with us, O Nyi Hung,' said Garvin, trying to frighten him 'I am the ambassador of Mazda, and wear his sacred symbol.'

Nyi Hung walked up to him and struck him across the lips with his clenched knuckles Then he laughed.

'Fool!' he said. 'Think you that we, of Kara-Ning, respect the pagan symbol of the Fire God? To-morrow you die '

His knuckles had broken Garvin's lips. The blood trickled down his chin Patricia felt sick with misery.

'Oh, Garvin .. they've hurt you!' she wailed

'Nothing but a scratch, old thing,' he said, smiling at her. 'Don't you worry your darling, blessed head about me.'

Standing beside Nyi Hung was a tall Chinaman of more prepossessing appearance than the high priest and his followers. He was Li Nang Wang, a wealthy native of Kara-Ning, claiming to be a prince of the blood royal of an illustrious line forgotten in civilised China and of which he was the last surviving member. He was quite young; of slender build, with an immensely long pigtail and a certain dignity of bearing and countenance, although he had the flat

yellow face, high cheek-bones, and black, slanting eyes of the Mongolians. Amongst his own people he was considered a handsome youth; respected for his riches and the number of his slaves and wives. He owned the largest dwelling in Kara-Ning and—after Nyi Hung himself—was the most eminent and powerful man in the ancient city.

He had seen the White Jade before; been present at her supposed sacrifice to the Siberian Tiger God, and had looked with secret longing on her pale beauty. Li Nang Wang adored beauty. In his way he was an artist; a collector of beautiful, delicate things. His own home was a veritable museum of wonderful lacquer, paintings, ornaments, and precious stones. His beauty-loving eye had fallen upon Patricia desirously and he had regretted her death. It had been a profound surprise and delight to him to learn that she had not died and that Nyi Hung was bent on recovering her from the hands of the desert chief, Wing Ko. Interested, he had come with Nyi Hung to-night to witness the conquest of Wing Ko and the re-capture of the White Jade.

Now that he looked upon her again, Li Nang Wang felt his amorous Chinese heart stir with renewed longing. How white she was, he thought; how slender and beautiful in her rich ivory robes. Her hair glittered like spun gold in the moonlight. He wanted to pass his fingers through it dreamily; to take her back to his beautiful house and place her amongst his women, where he could feast his eyes upon her. She was so beautiful; she would fit in amongst his lovely things.

Li Nang Wang was of an entirely different temperament to Chai Yin or Nyi Hung, or any of the Chinamen against whom Patricia had fought and from whom she had fled during these past terrible months. He was neither ferocious nor blood-thirsty nor brutal. He had perhaps a vein of cruelty in him, like so many Chinese, but on the whole he was a princely, artistic youth; spoiled and pampered by women and used to gaining his heart's desire. At the moment the White Jade was his heart's desire. He regretted infinitely that she belonged to the gods and must die to-morrow. Were he not a religious young man, he would himself have stolen her

from the gods But he feared Nyi Hung and would not have dared demand the White Jade for himself

Gar-Vin, the white man, was something beneath his notice, but he let his slanting eyes rest on Patricia's pale, lovely face with passion and something approaching pity.

Pat saw that look ... became suddenly conscious of the interest she had awakened in the slender youth beside Nyi Hung. It did not console her. It only added to her terror. She shivered and averted her eyes.

Li Nang Wang sighed. He thought of his exquisite house, his garden filled with perfumed flowers and singing birds; his ivory lute on which he could play tender love-songs. He wanted the White Jade of the golden hair. It was a pity she must die; that his passion for her would for ever go unrequited. There were many almond-eyed maidens sighing for his favours; and many pretty, plump, golden-skinned wives, with plump, golden babies, belonged to him But he was weary of them He desired new beauty and a new delight.

All the way to Kara-Ning across the desert, Li Nang Wang kept his gaze on the White Jade She, arms pinioned, sat on a camel, before Nyi Hung, utterly despairing, and had eyes only for Garvin who rode a camel behind. He was securely bound with leather thongs and guarded on either side by Nyi Hung's soldiers.

They left the river settlement behind them The ground was littered with dead; the river ran red with the blood of those who had fought in vain. Behind Nyi Hung's cortège stumbled many prisoners; mostly women and children, who would be sold to-morrow in Kara-Ning as slaves Nyi Hung was satisfied. Much money would fill the sacred coffers of the temple, and the wrath of the Tiger God would be appeased.

XXIV

Dawn was breaking as Pat and Garvin were taken into the temple at Kara-Ning. It seemed to them both that in a very short time now they would be done to death by Nyi Hung's priests. The new day was at hand. There was no hope of escape.

Pat prayed wildly that Garvin would be kept with her until the end, but this pleasure was not allowed them. They were separated and taken to the cells for solitary confinement. When Pat was led away by two of the shorn and shaven Bonzes, she struggled and looked back at her lover; her eyes full of anguish and terror. It was easy to be brave when she was with him, but now . . . to be torn from his side . . . perhaps never to see him again in this life . . . oh, that was terrible!

'Garvin! . . . Garvin!' she sobbed his name. 'Oh, my dear, good-bye.'

Garvin, held by two of the priests, looked after her vanishing figure, his heart near to bursting. What would they do to her, his darling, his poor, hapless Pat? It nearly drove him mad to know that he was impotent to help or protect her. For an instant he fought and struggled with his captors. But he only bruised himself and received cruel kicks and blows. The sweat poured down his face. His bloodshot eyes followed Pat's white figure.

'Good-bye, sweetheart. God be with you,' he shouted after her.

'God be with you, Garvin,' her voice floated to him from a long distance. Then he heard a mocking laugh. Nyi Hung was laughing . . . chuckling evilly in the gloom of the great temple hall.

Pat was locked in a dank, dark cell under the high altar. Garvin was flung into the cell which Bill Trensham had but

recently occupied. It was crawling with vermin and the air was foetid. Garvin shuddered as he looked round. Wet stone walls, filthy stone floor, and a door securely barred. No hope of escape . . . not even a window; only a hole for ventilation and through which a hand thrust water and rice for his meal.

But Garvin did not fear for himself. As the pearl-grey dawn broke over Kara-Ning he paced up and down his cell in an agony of anxiety about Patricia.

'My God, my God, if they hurt her . . . if they touch her . . I shall go mad,' he thought feverishly.

Pat crouched in her own dark, evil-smelling prison and went down to the very depths of despair.

No sun, no light penetrated under the temple. It was cold and frightful down here. She grew chilled, and began to shiver violently in the white, embroidered robe which was now piteously soiled and crushed. Only one cry escaped her pale lips.

'Garvin! . . . Garvin!'

If she could have stayed with him, felt his arms about her, the thought of death would not have held so many terrors, and a prison-cell might have spelt heaven. But total separation from him was the greatest cruelty she had yet had to suffer. It robbed her of all her courage

An hour after the prisoners had been locked in their respective cells, a slim, small shape stole down the subterranean passage and unlocked Garvin's door. He paused in his restless pacing, and found himself face to face with the Silk Moth, Nyi Hung's daughter For a moment he stared at the little creature whom he had last seen in his junk on the river. She was, as usual, exquisitely attired. She was in amber-coloured satin trousers and coat, embroidered with gold threads; many jewelled stick-pins in her blue-black hair. Her almond eyes gazed up at him, beaming with wicked delight.

'Greetings, Gar-Vin,' she said. 'Welcome back to my father's temple.'

'So it's you,' said Garvin, with a short, hard laugh. 'Well, my friend, and what do you want?'

She saw his eyes dart past her to the open door and shook her head.

'Nay, you cannot escape. If you reach the end of the passage you will find guards.'

Garvin folded his arms on his chest.

'Well, why have you come?' he asked.

She stole nearer him, and laid a tiny, jewelled hand on his sleeve.

'The Silk Moth has not forgotten the White Lord's Western kiss,' she said in a low voice. 'You were cruel to me once, O Gar-Vin, but I am of a forgiving nature and——'

'Well?' said Garvin, his eyes narrowing. He knew quite well that she had not come on an errand of mercy, and he waited grimly for what she had to say.

'If you will but love me, O Gar-Vin, I will set you free. My father desires the death of the hideous white woman, but he is not particular about you. If I want you I can have you.'

'I see,' said Garvin. 'The price of my freedom is to depend on whether I become your lover or not?'

'Yes . . . O Gar-Vin'—she stood on tip-toe and clutched at his arms with her tiny fingers—'am I not desirable to you? Will you come with me?'

'If you will set free the White Jade—yes.'

'Set her free? Never!'

'Very well, I stay where I am,' said Garvin.

The Silk Moth drew a sharp breath of disappointment. She had always wanted the white man for her lover. She had felt sure he would accept his freedom at her hands.

'Fool, fool!' she said furiously. 'Do you prefer torture and death, to love with me?'

'If the White Jade suffers torture and death, I too will suffer,' said Garvin. 'Farewell.'

Her hands dropped from him. She became a little wild-cat of fury and thwarted passion . . . screamed at him . . . cursed him, then turned and ran from the cell, not forgetting to lock the door behind her.

Garvin sank down on to the ground and put his head between his hands.

'Go with her, that painted little pagan doll, and leave you to suffer and die alone, my Pat,' he whispered. 'No, no, a thousand times no. It is not given to man to know what lies beyond the grave, but there may be a meeting for us after the

pain and the death, my darling – oh, my darling!'

A queer, low rumble, as of thunder or of great guns, reverberated through the temple. Garvin raised his head and listened. Surely it was not thunder. The dawn had looked serene and fair. There was another rumble, and this time the cell seemed to shake under Garvin. Uneasily he stood up and stared through the darkness.

'That's queer,' he said aloud. 'Deuced like an earthquake shock to me.'

XXV

Up above ground in the beautiful, peaceful Chinese city, that lay so like a toy town under the shadow of the Ki-Shan Mountains, the people came out of their houses and stood huddled in their doorways, looking towards the mountains with anxious eyes.

There had been a distinct earthquake shock. One and all had felt the tremor of it—rushed from their dwellings. The dawn which had broken in serene beauty was no longer fair or calm. Great clouds were massing and a strange, deathly stillness hung over Kara-Ning now. A queer, leaden pall . . . grey and ominous. What frightened the people most was the sight of a puff of smoke coming out of the crater of a volcano in the mountains. This volcano was supposed to be dead. There had not been an eruption for hundreds of years. But now it was undoubtedly active. The subterranean roaring and rumbling which had shaken Garvin's and Patricia's cells were precursory symptoms of the eruption to follow.

Many people pointed to the smoke rising from the crater and wailed aloud.

'Look . . . look. Shara-Naryn is alive . . . boiling!'

'Shara-Naryn is about to burst . . . we shall be destroyed.'

'People of Kara-Ning, run for your lives!'

These and many other cries filled the air. In less than ten minutes the peaceful city was a mass of swarming, terror-stricken people, snatching up their treasures and running toward the city walls.

The grey pall seemed to grow darker, the silence more intense, and those who looked toward the volcano known as Shara-Naryn saw a sudden cloud of vapour bursting from the crater. This was followed by a general quaking of the earth, and one or two houses, built of bamboo and paper,

collapsed, burying the occupants who were still packing up treasures.

This was the signal to a general upheaval. Women with their babies fled, shrieking, toward the city walls. Men and boys rushed madly down the streets of Kara-Ning shouting to each other. The darkness increased to add to the terror, and then suddenly a column of vapour and ashes shot out of the crater terminating in a vast canopy of cloud, and rushed down the mountainside toward the village in a hot, molten stream. Red-hot cinders and ashes were ejected into the air; fell in showers on to Kara-Ning. Wherever they fell they wrought death and destruction. One after another, the pretty bamboo houses burst into flames. There had been fire and confusion in Wing Ko's settlement, but nothing compared to the horror of the volcanic eruption which totally wiped out Kara-Ning that memorable day.

Now the great temple rocked on its foundations. Nyi Hung and his priests rushed out in terror of their lives, no longer interested in their sacrifice. The victims, incarcerated in their cells, were forgotten.

Dark clouds, laden with ash, were shot through by volcanic lightning which illuminated the scene of confusion and terror in the city. A steady red-hot stream of lava flowed from Shara-Naryn. The people fleeing away from the mountain-side were many of them burned to death on the way. Women and children were trampled underfoot as the terrified mob surged toward the city walls.

Now a deluge of mud-lava rushed violently down the mountain-side and destroyed every dwelling and human being it reached. There were fresh explosions from the crater, more violent tremors under earth, and ten minutes after the first eruption scarcely a house in Kara-Ning remained standing intact. The air was thick with smoke. Red-hot cinders blinded the eyes of the crowd that fled wildly in every direction. Shrieks and groans mingled with the roar of the discharging volcano.

Garvin Stewart escaped from his cell through an extraordinary accident. During one of the subterranean tremors a great crack appeared in the door of his cell—a

crack so wide that he was able to wriggle his body through it. His heart beat fast with strange terror as he found himself free in the dark passage. He did not realise yet that a volcano was in eruption, and he did not know what to make of the extraordinary rumblings and roarings. He ran wildly up and down the passage for a few moments, wondering where he could find Patricia.

'Pat! Pat! Where are you?' he shouted.

But no voice answered him, and finally, in despair, he rushed to the end of the passage and found a staircase. Reaching the top of this staircase, he saw that he was in the heart of the temple . . . close to the high altar itself. But the vast place was empty . . . silent . . . not a soul had remained in it. Garvin, haggard and wild-eyed, stared about him; then felt the ground rock under his feet.

'My God, the place is going to fall,' he thought, and tore madly toward the main entrance. He only just got out before the great temple collapsed and tumbled with a terrific crash into a heap.

Now Garvin saw Shara-Naryn belching smoke and flames over the city, and he knew what had happened. He stared wildly at the lean, yellow figures of the Chinese rushing toward the city walls. His one and only thought was Pat. He wondered if she had met her end in the earthquake . . . been buried alive, just now, when the temple had fallen.

A shower of red-hot cinders came toward him. With a groan, he turned and fled with the mob toward safety—fleeing from death itself. The thought of Pat was submerged in the natural, frantic instinct for self-preservation.

XXVI

Had Garvin but realised it, half an hour ago, when Nyi Hung and his priests rushed out of the temple, the worthy Li Nang Wang had emerged from his dwelling, his pockets stuffed with precious stones and gold. Even in the terror of the eruption, his thoughts turned to the White Jade.

Nyi Hung had fled. The White Jade, doubtless, was in the cells of sacrifice and could be stolen easily. What use to leave her there if there was to be no sacrifice?

Nang Wang, if nothing else, was an ardent lover, and his passion led him to fly down to the temple cells and seek the pale girl of the golden hair whom he desired.

All the priests had not yet left, and when Nang Wang waylaid one of the Bonzes and said that he had come on behalf of Nyi Hung for the White Jade, the young Chinese priest unlocked the door of Pat's cell without hesitation, then fled on his own way, to safety.

Pat, who had been terrified by the queer noises and quakings, looked breathlessly at Li Nang Wang as he entered her cell. He advanced toward her, slender hands outstretched.

'Fear not, Pearl of Beauty,' he said. 'I, Li Nang Wang, will take care of you for ever.'

Pat could not understand this speech. But she shrank back from him.

'Garvin!' she screamed 'Garvin, where are you?'

Li Nang Wang, close to her, closer than he had ever dared hope to be, sighed in ecstasy!

'Oh, White Jade! . . . oh, Exquisite!' he said.

His long, strong young arms went round her. He lifted her off her feet and held her securely against him. She fought and struggled vainly. Nang Wang was too strong for her. He

carried her out of the temple into the lurid and terrifying scene of the destruction of Kara-Ning.

From her position in his arms, she gasped and cried aloud at the terrible, unexpected sight that met her eyes. She had been entombed in the cells of sacrifice since dawn. When she had last seen Kara-Ning the city had lain a thing of beauty under a radiant sky. Now it was smoking ruins; blazing wood and paper. The air was dark with smoke and flying ash; fraught with danger and destruction.

She looked up at the volcano, and hid her face on the Chinaman's shoulder, shuddering. It was a fearsome sight, that boiling, erupting crater, and her eyes quickly grew sore from the flying cinders and pieces of grit. Everywhere the unfortunate people were fleeing; trying to escape death. There were yawning chasms in the streets, caused by the earthquake. There were corpses everywhere.

'Oh, my God!' thought Patricia. 'Where is Garvin?'

Garvin was still locked in his cell. The tremor that split his door in twain had not yet come, and by the time he himself rushed out of the temple, Patricia had completely disappeared.

Li Nang Wang was lucky. Unharmed, his pockets stuffed with gold and jewels, he carried the White Jade to the city walls. Though slenderly built, he was supple and strong, and Pat had grown pitifully light during these last few months. Her weight was nothing to him; and she did not struggle, because she was too weak and too petrified by the horror and destruction all around her. She only moaned her lover's name again and again in futile despair.

'Oh, Garvin ... Garvin ... Garvin!'

In and out the crowds—leaping deftly across the great chinks in the road brought about by the earthquakes—Nang Wang eventually brought his burden safely through the great gate, past the Jade Tomb, which Pat had cause to remember only too well, into the desert itself. The arid open spaces swarmed with refugees from the ruined city: despairing men ... weeping women ... wailing babies. Some had snatched up tables, chairs, bedding; some had nothing. But one and all were faced with desolation and despair.

Their homes were shattered. Kara-Ning was no more. Their rice-fields, their fragrant bean-fields, were scorched and withered. Henceforward how would they live?

Here in the desert at least there was peace from the fury of the volcano. The deluge of red-hot lava could not reach them. But it was dark and hot and sinister, and the unhappy crowd crouched on the ground and looked toward Shara-Naryn in dumb misery.

Nobody paid any attention to Li Nang Wang or the white girl in his arms. Everybody was too concerned with their own misfortunes. But the young Chinaman searched amongst the weeping refugees and found what he wanted . . . another young man who had been his friend. This friend—Wu Ts'in—was sitting by the city gates, his arms locked about his knees, staring gloomily before him. In one hand he held a rope, to which was attached two camels.

He greeted Nang Wang joyfully.

'My honourable friend has escaped death, then! All hail!' he exclaimed.

'I have not lived in vain now that I have beheld my beloved friend once more,' answered Nang Wang superlatively. 'I have been searching the rabble for you, O Ts'in. Listen. We must get away across the desert. In Feng Hsi I have friends to give us fresh transport, and thence we can go to my blood-brother who lives in Shang Tao, the great civilised city wherein Westerns reside.'

Patricia heard the word Shang Tao. Her dazed brain just took in that familiar name. Her blue eyes opened, and she stared at Nang Wang's proud young face. His sloe-black almond eyes met hers. The passion that swept into those slanting eyes terrified her; destroyed any hope she might have entertained that he was different to the rest. Certainly he was young and of princely birth, but how could she appeal to him when she could not even speak his language? Ah, if only she knew Chinese . . . could beg this boy to be merciful . . . to search for Garvin. But the only thing she could do was to grasp the name of the city which she knew was civilised, and where there lay some hope of escape for her.

'Shang Tao,' she said huskily. 'Shang Tao . . . Shang Tao!'

Li Nang Wang's black eyes glistened. He tightened his hold of her.

'You wish to go with me to Shang Tao,' he said, misunderstanding. 'O White Jade, it shall be!'

Ts'in stared at the girl.

'Lo, it is the White Jade!' he said in an awe-stricken voice.

'She is for the red bridal chair and for me—not for death,' said Nang Wang softly. 'Come, my friend, let us mount these camels and get away.'

'We must have food and water for the journey,' said Ts'in.

Nang Wang nodded.

'I have a plan,' he said. 'Look you, the settlement of the desert robber, Wing Ko, is but a few miles away. We left not a living soul there, but there were many junks and houses intact, containing all the rice and flour we shall require, and may be some baggage-ponies wandering about which we can catch and use for our purpose. Come, let us ride our camels to the river.'

Patricia was lifted on to one of the camels, and Li Nang Wang mounted behind her. Wu Ts'in rode the other camel beside them, applauding Nang Wang for the wisdom and cunning of his plan.

Unnoticed, the two riders left the wailing crowd outside the ruined city. When the air beat upon Pat's face, reviving her, she realised that she was leaving Garvin behind her and that she was at the mercy of this young Chinese.

'Garvin ... Garvin!' she wailed.

'Lo, the White Jade calls for Gar-Vin,' said Wu Ts'in uneasily.

Nang Wang's face became set and stubborn.

'The White Jade is mine,' was his reply.

By the time they reached the Tsi-Fu River, the unnatural darkness brought about by the volcanic disaster had lifted. The sun was shining brilliantly on the river, turning it to smooth green glass.

Patricia, from the camel, gazed with sore, aching eyes on the one-time settlement of the desert thieves, which was now deserted and ruined. Not a human being had been left alive by Nyi Hung's ravaging soldiers, and even the dead had

vanished—been carried off by vultures and jackals. But one or two junks, intact, and some of the little huts on the river-banks, were still standing there. Upon these Li Nang Wang's eyes focused triumphantly. He had been right. He would find victuals and water-bottles here, enough for the long journey over the desert.

Somehow the sight of the deserted settlement brought a hot mist across the eyes of the tired girl. It all reminded her so painfully of Garvin. She had suffered here; but here, also, she had known the delight of his love; learned the meaning of a great, rapturous passion in his arms. She saw immediately that their old junk still floated serenely on the sunlit water. She would have given worlds to find herself in the peace and security of that little lacquered cabin with Garvin once again.

Several ponies had remained in the settlement, and were easily caught by the two young Chinamen and laden with food. An hour later the two camels were turned toward Feng Hsi, followed by the baggage-ponies. It was the last time Patricia was to set eyes on the ruined river-village and that treacherous river.

She grew dumb with despair as the day lengthened into night. At length, under a sky of blazing stars, she found herself in the arid wastes of the desert with Li Nang Wang and his friend, Wu Ts'in. It seemed to her now that she had put a thousand miles between herself and her lover. God alone knew what would happen to her now . . . or what had happened to him.

So far she had had no cause to complain of her captor's treatment. He was more gentle, more courteous than Chai Yin or Ming Ho had been. He solicitously brought cushions and wraps for her, as well as plenty to eat and drink from Wing Ko's settlement. When the first day's journey ended he made her lie down on the cushions; fanned the insects off her pale, weary little face; brought her little cakes made from flour and water, boiled rice; yellow wine.

She ate and drank mechanically. She might have refused nourishment and allowed herself to starve and die. But there was still the wild hope in the bottom of her heart that if she

reached civilisation she would escape from this young Chinese and secure help for Garvin. There was Bill, too. Bill had gone to fetch help. She might meet Bill and the rescue-party on the way back to Shang Tao.

Li Nang Wang was, as we know, a youth of noble lineage. His delicate breeding made him very gentle and respectful to the White Jade whom he presumed was, in her own way, a princess. He sat for hours at her side, drinking in the beauty of her ivory skin and the hair that was golden silk. He adored beauty ... the White Jade's loveliness was a never-failing source of delight to him. He treated her as he would have treated a piece of fragile porcelain in his own beautiful house. A coarse touch or jar would smash it. Beyond lifting Pat up on to the camel or down from it, he would not presume to lay hands on her ... *yet*. He would never take by force the bride who had been once destined for the high gods. He would marry her, religiously, when he reached the home of his blood-brother in Shang Tao.

An artist in many ways, he was artistic as a lover. He regretted profoundly that the White Jade could not speak his language nor understand the beautiful things he said to her in his dreamy voice. He was anxious to reach his blood-brother, Li Pong Lo, who spoke many European languages and might interpret for him all that he said. He wished the White Jade to know of his adoration and his desire.

During the long, tedious journey, which Pat remembered having taken in Chai Yin's car, she ceased to be afraid of young Li Nang Wang. But she felt with secret uneasiness that behind his mask of kindness and courtesy lay that cruelty dominant in most Chinese. She believed that Li Nang Wang was waiting his time; felt, with an ever-growing sense of horror and despair, that unless she could escape from him soon, the gentle, smooth-tongued youth would change into a passionate master, eager to take and bend her to his will.

Her heart seemed to break with the memory of Garvin and their love. Sometimes, at night, she lay sleepless on her cushions, staring through tear-dimmed eyes up at the splendour of the stars, remembering Garvin's tenderness, his kisses, the many storms through which they had passed.

Sometimes she would hear his voice, encouraging her, helping her, saying: 'Oh, my dear, my Lovely One . . . I love you so!'

And every day they drew nearer and nearer Feng Hsi.

XXVII

Unfortunately for Patricia, Bill Trensham and his rescue-party did not cross the desert on the direct route chosen by Li Nang Wang. He lost his bearings, and travelled toward Kara-Ning in roundabout fashion, thereby missing poor Pat.

Bill had reached civilisation safely, and like a bombshell had landed upon the Shang Tao Club with his astounding news. The English and Americans at the club listened open-mouthed, amazed by the vivid descriptions he gave of his experiences and of the pagan city lying under the Ki-Shan Mountains across the great desert plain.

Amazement was mingled with horror when Bill gave a graphic description of the danger in which Garvin Stewart and Patricia Moreland had been left. Of course Bill knew no further than that Pat awaited death at the hands of the fanatic Wing Ko, and that Garvin, weak from the effects of his fever, was rushing to her rescue. But Bill's one idea was to get up a party of white men keen for an adventure and to retrace his footsteps with them across the desert and save Garvin and Pat from final disaster.

The response to his appeal was immediate. There were many young Britishers and some Americans at the club with few ties, plenty of money, and a thirst for thrilling adventure.

Trensham offered the latter with both hands. Grimly he promised them a more thrilling adventure than they had dreamed of; scenes which might have evolved from the brain of Rider Haggard in his wildest romances.

Bill himself was a tired man, weakened by fever and the terrible experiences through which he had passed in Nyi Hung's temple. But he gave himself not an instant's rest. The moment he reached Shang Tao, he organised this relief-party; rushed about from pillar to post; scarcely gave himself

opportunity to enjoy the soft beds and good food and many other luxuries offered by civilisation

His first object had been to find Sir Eric Hughes, who had not died of the wounds received in Canhung. Sir Eric was in a very rocky condition, however; one of the knife-thrusts he had received had set up a general blood-poisoning. He was still very weak, and more or less a chronic invalid. His doctors had wanted to send him back to England, but the Inspector-General had refused to leave China until he had been convinced that Patricia Moreland was no longer alive. Sonia Mason, his sister, shared his feelings. She had been stricken with grief by the mysterious and sinister disappearance of Patricia in Canhung. Brother and sister were overwhelmingly glad when Bill Trensham returned to Shang Tao to tell the tale that Pat still lived. But it appeared to them both that she was in terrible danger from which she might never escape, so their joy in Bill's news was sadly diminished.

Eric Hughes gave Bill every encouragement to start back at once for the desert.

'God knows I'd like to be coming with you, Trensham,' he said, his thin face puckered. 'But this damned blood-poisoning has done for me. I wouldn't get farther than the first mile in the desert.'

'That's all right; I'll bring Patricia back if I can, sir,' said Bill.

And his heart ached for remembrance of the girl who had smiled so gallantly at him when he had left her, alone, facing a ghastly death by the Tsi-Fu River.

Sonia Mason, although a widow, was still a very young woman. Her husband had died tragically on their honeymoon, three years ago. She was now only twenty-six; a pretty, vivid brunette with dark, crisp hair and warm brown eyes. She said good-bye to Bill Trensham before he left Shang Tao for the desert, the tears sparkling on her lashes.

'I wish to God I were a man and could come with you, Mr. Trensham,' she said. 'I echo what Eric says—heartily. Poor, poor little Pat! What hell she has suffered!'

'She has, but please heaven we'll get her back here,' said Bill.

Sonia Mason wiped her eyes and tried to smile at the big, boyish man, whose own face seemed to her much too thin and haggard despite its sunburn. Bill Trensham, surely, had also seen hell. It lay in those vivid blue eyes of his.

Just at this moment Bill Trensham was not thinking of his journey to Wing Ko's settlement. He was finding young Mrs. Mason very sweet and attractive in her cool white dress. How charmingly her dark hair curled about her head; how sweet was the sympathy in her brown eyes! Suddenly, overwhelmingly, Bill Trensham fell in love. He caught one of her hands and kissed it.

'I'll look forward to coming back, to seeing *you* again,' he said huskily.

Then he was gone.

Sonia Mason put her flushed face against the hand he had kissed. She had thought that she would never love again after poor Hugh Mason had died—smashed himself up in his racing-car during their honeymoon—no man could ever take Hugh's place. But to-day her heart told her otherwise. There was nothing, no one on earth for her now—but Bill. Nothing she wanted, would pray for more earnestly than Bill's return.

With a dozen stalwart eager young men in a small fleet of Citroëns, containing much ammunition and plenty of supplies both in the way of food and medicine, Bill Trensham set out for the rescue of Garvin Stewart and Patricia Moreland.

The rescue-party crossed Pat in the desert, just about two miles out of sight of each other.

And while Pat went on toward Feng Hsi on Li Nang Wang's camel, Trensham and his party plodded on across the arid wastes toward the Ki-Shan Mountains.

Three weeks later Bill's party came to the Tsi-Fu River and Wing Ko's settlement. But there was desolation and decay . . . not a living soul . . . nothing remaining of the desert thieves or their leader. Only a few deserted junks rocking mournfully on the jade-green water; only a few sinister carrion birds flapping their wings amongst the ruins.

The rescue-party looked at this scene with wonder and

interest. But Bill Trensham's haggard young face became grim and anxious.

'God alone knows what has happened here,' he said. 'The whole settlement is deserted. Stewart may or may not have reached Miss Moreland in time, but at any rate the whole show here is bust up.'

'Say, Trensham, what do we do now?' asked Randal Cullum—a bronzed young American giant, as keen on this adventure as any of them.

'Turn our faces to Kara-Ning,' said Trensham slowly. 'There is just one chance that we may find Stewart and Miss Moreland there.'

The gallant little fleet of Citroen-Kegresses rolled away from the Tsi-Fu River toward Kara-Ning. It was dark when they reached the city, but a full moon beamed down brilliantly, lighting up a scene that made Trensham's heart leap into his throat.

'God have mercy!' he ejaculated as he sprang from the car and stared before him. 'What has happened here?'

They had left desolation and decay behind them on the river. But here, under the spur of the great mountains, lay a terrible scene of ruin. The whole city, which Trensham remembered so vividly—pretty, golden, fairy-like, with its miniature lakes full of goldfish, its pagodas and flower-filled gardens, its happy, industrious people working in their bean- and rice-fields—lay in ruins. Scarce a house remained standing. The colossal temple wherein Bill had been incarcerated was a heap of great stones and fallen pillars. There were yawning chasms where the gay streets had crossed each other. In the bright moonlight the whole scene appeared sinister and terrible. Kara-Ning was like the city of the dead.

Bill gave a cry.

'My God, my God, what can have happened to Stewart—and that poor girl? We are too late!'

'Looks as though there's been a volcanic eruption and an earthquake, Trensham,' observed one of the rescue-party, named Morgan, a grey-haired Englishman who had travelled round the globe three times, spoke seven

languages, and was an enthusiastic archaeologist. 'By jove! That's a magnificent gate!'

He pointed to the great city gates, which had remained intact, his eyes shining behind their horn-rimmed spectacles. But Trensham stared up at the shadowy mountains, and his tired, sore eyes were hot with tears. He would have given his life to save his friends. Somehow it seemed to him all wrong that he should be standing here, alive, well, in safety—without Garvin and Pat.

Suddenly a lean yellow shape in a torn blue cotton suit slunk round the corner of the gate. It was like seeing a ghost emerge from the ruined city and startled the party. But Trensham immediately sprang to action.

'Here's a living creature to tell the tale, anyhow,' he said. 'Morgan, you speak all kinds of Chinese. Question this yellow devil—quickly.'

Two of the party seized the yellow 'ghost' and dragged him to Bertram Morgan, who gazed at him with keen, inquisitive eyes, much as he would have stared at a botanical specimen. The Chinaman was a young man, very emaciated and miserable. He was frightened to death of the white strangers, and instantly fell on his knees, whining for mercy.

Morgan shot a few questions at him in Chinese. The yellow man, less scared when he heard his own language, answered. A rapid conversation took place between the two, with much gesticulating on the part of the Chinaman. Then Morgan turned to Bill, who was looking on in an agony of impatience.

'As I thought, Trensham. The city was wiped out by a volcanic eruption from that crater yonder—Shara-Naryn, they call it—many weeks ago. This fellow says only fifty or more people survived, and that many have since died of starvation. A handful were left to try and save something from the ruins and cultivate their rice-fields again.'

'But Stewart—what does he know of Stewart?' asked Trensham.

'He says your friend Stewart, whom he calls Gar-Vin, is still alive and living among the ruins in the city.'

A great light shot into Bill's eyes.

'Oh, thank God! What else?'

'He says the high priest, Nyi Hung, and his daughter the Silk Moth, and all their satellites perished in one of the earth tremors. Stewart has apparently gone a bit crazy and lives quite alone, just eating and drinking enough to keep him alive. The others leave him alone because they have a respect for the mad.'

'Has the poor chap been sent off his chump, then?' said Bill in horror.

'It looks like it, Trensham. This fellow says that he calls day and night for the White Jade and searches the ruins for her body.'

'Then Pat is still missing?'

'It seems so,' said Morgan sympathetically.

Bill swallowed hard. He turned to the party.

'Come on,' he said. 'We'd better find poor old Stewart and see if we can pull him round. Thank the Lord we've brought Wallace with us.'

Dr. Wallace—a brilliant young physician who had already made his mark in England, and had been taking a long holiday in China when Trensham had gathered his relief-force together—patted Bill on the back.

'Buck up, Trensham,' he said 'I daresay we'll be able to pull Stewart together.'

'Lead us to Gar-Vin, you fellow,' Morgan snapped to the still-kneeling Chinaman.

The yellow man folded his skinny hands in his sleeves and slunk through the city gates into the ruins. A very solemn band of white men followed him, staring about them in wonder and amaze.

XXVIII

When Patricia, with her two young Chinese noblemen, reached the more or less civilised city of Feng Hsi, on the fringe of the desert, she did not know whether to be sorry or glad. At least the torture of the long desert journey was over. Her whole body ached from the hours of riding that lurching camel; and despite all Nang Wang's ministrations she had suffered considerably from fever, the maddening insects, the dust and heat. Feng Hsi meant rest, a roof over her head, and a much cooler atmosphere. But it did not mean freedom; and for that Patricia was sorry—almost sorry that she had not died in the desert. She was so dreading the day when this strange young Chinaman would cease to be a devotee at the shrine of her beauty and change into a tyrant and beast.

Feng Hsi was a small mining town. It had railways and factories, and when Pat's aching, bloodshot eyes first saw a train gliding along its rails and smoke emerging from the chimney of a big factory, she could have cried aloud with the pleasure of seeing civilisation again; she had been so long in a pagan world, where strange gods were worshipped and strange men lived.

Her joy soon turned to fresh despair when she found it impossible to escape from her captor. She pleaded with him, wept, demanded, cajoled, but always with the infuriating knowledge that he could not understand and that she could not speak his language.

There were, of course, no hotels in Feng Hsi, and Li and his friend Ts'in took Pat to an eating-house wherein they obtained a room for her. This room was dirty and hot and reeked of joss-sticks. Pat felt sick when she staggered into it and the door closed behind Ts'in, who left her alone with Li Nang Wang. The walls were hung with cheap Chinese

posters and there was no furniture, only a kind of pallet on the floor, which was a form of Chinese bed

Nang Wang, however, spread cushions on the floor for Pat, and gave her the silken wraps he had taken from one of the deserted junks on the river.

'This disgusting and ill-bred eating-house is not worthy for the feet of my gracious and beautiful lady,' he said to Pat, with much feeling. 'But it is necessary we rest here To-morrow we go to my blood-brother in Shang Tao, and his lovely house will make a better setting for your loveliness, O Jewel of my Delight.'

Pat, without understanding, gave a tired sigh.

'Please go away and leave me alone,' she said.

Nang Wang's almond eyes gazed at her quite mournfully. The White Jade looked thin and pale and broken-hearted. Her ivory satin robes were stained and crushed. It hurt his amorous Chinese heart to see her thus. He put out a slender hand and timidly touched her golden hair. Immediately she shrank from him and cried out:

'Don't—don't!'

Li Nang Wang went thoughtfully away, wondering how he might win the approbation and love of this fragile Lotus Lily.

Pat sank down on the cushions and gave a shuddering sob.

'Garvin . . Garvin . . . if you are dead, I wish I could die, too.'

The afternoon was drawing to a close. Outside the eating-house the busy little Chinese town hummed and throbbed. A factory whistle shrilled out and made Pat tremble violently; she was a bundle of nerves. A raucous burst of laughter from some mining yellow men downstairs in the eating-house brought the frightened colour to her white cheeks and fear into her great blue eyes.

Li Nang Wang had mentioned the word 'Shang Tao'—please heaven he would, indeed, take her there, she thought. If only she could see a European, someone who spoke her language; escape from Nang Wang, find her way back to her own people

She stared, wide-eyed, shuddering at the door through

which Li had just passed, and wondered if she dared close her eyes in sleep that night. But Li did not return, and gradually sheer exhaustion mastered her. She lay down on the cushions, closed her tired eyes, and slept.

In her dreams that night she was with Garvin again; they were clasped in each other's arms and his lips were on her mouth, his passionate heart beating against her own. She moaned and cried his name in her sleep. Then his dear face changed, became the face of Chai Yin . . . bland, fat, smiling; changed again into the loathsome yellow mask of Nyi Hung the high priest; and finally into the finer features of Nang Wang. But his almond eyes burnt with terrible passion and he was holding her . . . drawing her to him, his long fingers tangled in her golden hair. She woke herself up, shrieking with fright, bathed from head to foot in a sweat of terror.

She knew no more rest or sleep that night.

Morning came. Long before Nang Wang entered her room Pat was awake, pacing up and down her room, hoping against hope that the end of her misfortunes was in sight—that when she reached Shang Tao her troubles would all end.

But she soon knew the worst. When Li entered her room he brought with him a rather fat, toothless old Chinese woman—a filthy bundle of rags with greasy black hair in a knob at the back of her head, and evil eyes. This creature had in her youth been the mistress of a degenerate white man and spoke pidgin-English. She greeted Pat with a toothless smile and said:

'Me amah . . . speakee English.'

The colour rushed to Pat's cheeks. She trembled with excitement.

'Oh, thank God . . . you speak English. Amah, tell this man'—she pointed to Li, who stood gravely watching her—'I want to go to Shang Tao to my friends—at once.'

The old woman gave Li a sly glance, then said:

'Honourable master Li Nang Wang askee me speakee for him. He no speakee English. He say you go longee him Shang Tao and mallee him.'

'Marry him!' repeated Pat in horror. 'No, no, never!

Amah, for the love of heaven tell him I am a British lady—my friend, Sir Eric Hughes of Shang Tao—I must be taken to him at once.'

The old amah translated this for Li, into whose soft, almond eyes there crept a look of proud anger. He answered her rapidly. She turned back to Pat.

'Li Nang Wang say he no care 'bout flends. He wantee mallee you. You must go longee him.'

A long, trying argument followed between Pat and the amah. Li Nang Wang remained obstinate. He wanted her—the White Jade—for his possession. If she would not go with him peacefully to his brother's house, she must be taken by force.

Pat began to scream . . . she was hysterical . . . unnerved by her numerous frightful experiences. And then the old amah, with a sinister laugh, pulled a little bottle out of her pocket and winked at Li Nang Wang. The young Chinaman pinioned Pat in his arms.

'Alas, Lotus Lily, it is necessary that I put you to sleep . . . just a little while,' he said in his silken voice. 'Like one in a dream you shall go with me to Shang Tao and awaken in my blood-brother's beautiful house. Good night, my Lovely One. Dream the poppy-dreams, O Exquisite, until I bid you wake.'

Pat shrieked and shrieked, terror convulsing her. The old amah poured something down her open mouth. For a moment she spluttered and gasped; then gave one or two little choking cries. The cries died down to one long moan. After that the face of Li Nang Wang faded out and Pat knew no more.

She was drugged with opium.

XXIX

Pat slept that deep, sinister 'poppy sleep' for many long hours; a sleep haunted by strange dreams; weird, swaying figures; curious, unknown faces with slanting, almond eyes and slender golden hands that seemed to pass over her face and her hair. These dreams punctuated the long, drugged rest, but for the most part she was oblivious of her surroundings.

When she came back to consciousness she was still like one heavily drugged although she was able to open her eyes, to walk, even to talk in a muttering, unintelligible way.

Then Li Nang Wang moved her from the eating-house in Feng Hsi. His friend, Ts'in, ever helpful, took one of Pat's arms; Nang Wang took the other. Thus they led her to the train, which steamed after dark from a funny little station in Feng Hsi through the interior toward the busier, more civilised part of China.

Pat was conscious in a vague sense that she walked . . . that she was guided by gentle hands from one place to another, but she could not protest or try to escape. She was too heavily drugged.

Nang Wang had been cunning. His desire for the love of the beautiful White Jade had sharpened his wits. He had taken care before he had left the old amah to make Pat look like a native girl, lest some Europeans should notice her pale face and golden hair and steal her from him. So Pat's face was stained with betel-nut and her gold hair tucked up under a little skull-cap of black silk, and her embroidered robes exchanged for a dark cotton suit; a blue jacket and little silk shoes with thick felt soles. She now resembled a young Chinese girl. Her eyes might have given her away had any English person looked keenly into them, but the pupils were

so dark and dilated from the effects of the drug that the blue of them was scarcely noticeable.

Between the two young Chinamen she travelled, quietly and unobtrusively, to Shang Tao. Poor little Pat! It would have broken her heart had she been sufficiently conscious of her surroundings to realise that she actually landed at the big station that night and went like a lamb where Nang Wang and Wu Ts'in led her. She brushed elbows with several white men, to whom she would only have had to say 'Help!' And she said nothing. Drugged, helpless, staring before her, she walked between her two captors straight into a rickshaw. Once inside the rickshaw, the curtains hid her from public view, and she was again lost to the world.

She had a vague idea of being lifted in somebody's arms out of the vehicle; of being carried into a warm room full of strange, subtle scents; of being placed on soft cushions. Then her heavy eyelids closed and she slept again.

She awoke—this time to real consciousness. The effects of the opium had worn off. She felt very sick, and her head ached abominably, but she was now fully alive to her surroundings.

She lay motionless, staring about her for several minutes, amazed at what she saw. Where was she? How came she to be in this room? The last thing she clearly recollected was that horrible, squalid room in the eating-house in Feng Hsi, on the border of the desert.

She had no idea of the time, nor of whether it was day or not. There were no windows in this room; only a ventilator high up on one wall. But it was the most exquisite room she had ever seen; octagonal; every wall hand-painted with brilliant coloured scenes of Chinese woodlands, rivers, mountains; each perfect little scene rimmed with ebony and gold. The floor was polished, and covered with many rich Chinese rugs. In one corner on a tall lacquered stand stood a huge Ming vase full of chrysanthemums, flame-coloured, beautiful. In another corner on a small ebony table lay a dwarf garden, cunningly cultivated. Here was a great crystal bowl full of glittering goldfish, swimming gaily in and out delicate green weeds. There was another priceless Nankin

bowl on a carved lacquered pedestal. Patricia lay on the floor upon a pile of immense cushions of every size and shape and colour. The atmosphere of this room was dim and full of musky sweetness. It made her feel sick. It was too sweet and the room was too definitely Oriental ... it seemed to Pat to mask something evil and dangerous.

Her heart suddenly gave a sharp jump and she staggered on to her feet, stood swaying, staring about her with hunted eyes.

'Where am I? Oh, my God ... where am I?'

Wildly she looked about for some means of escape. She saw neither window nor door. She seemed in a beautiful prison from which there could never be an exit. But she saw a small silver gong in one corner of this room, and she suddenly seized the stick and beat the gong desperately.

One of the painted silken panels of the octagonal chamber slid back noiselessly. Li Nang Wang, followed by a much bigger, fatter Chinaman with long pigtail and fierce moustache, entered the room. They were both gorgeously robed in satin, embroidered Chinese costume.

Pat stared from one to the other. Her temples felt as though they were splitting in twain with agony and her lips were dry and cracked. She said hoarsely:

'Where am I? Let me out ... let me go!'

Li Nang Wang looked at her with his sad, dreamy eyes and folded his slender hands in his wide sleeves. It was the big Chinaman who spoke—and, to Pat's relief, he addressed her in English.

'Greetings, O White Jade,' he said. 'I am Li Pong Lo—blood-brother to Li Nang Wang, who comes from over the desert to lighten my poor home with his illustrious presence.'

Pat stumbled across the room and reached his side. She clutched his arm.

'Mr. Pong Lo—for God's sake—you speak English—you must understand. I am not White Jade. I am Miss Moreland, and I live with Sir Eric Hughes in Shang Tao. Please, please, conduct me to my friends—at once.'

Li Pong Lo raised his eyebrows. He smiled.

'I regret,' he said, bowing. 'I cannot do so. My honourable brother desires you for the red bridal chair, and his wishes are also mine.'

The blood rushed to Pat's white cheeks.

'This is an outrage,' she said. 'Don't you understand who I am? If they get to know about this at the Consulate you will be made to answer for it.'

Li Pong Lo's fat, bland face assumed an expression of extreme disdain.

'Think you that I fear the English pigs,' he said, with a sudden snarl. 'No . . . I hate them and the very fact that you have been stolen from that pig-dog, the Inspector-General of Customs, makes me the more happy to know you are entirely in my and my brother's hands.'

Pat's eyes dilated.

'For heaven's sake—Mr. Pong Lo—I have done nothing to you to deserve ill-treatment and— —'

'You will not receive ill-treatment,' he broke in more courteously. 'As the future bride of my blood-brother, who is infatuated with your white beauty, I will treat you in my house as an illustrious guest.'

'But I want to go back to my friends,' the girl argued, a pulse hammering in her dry throat. 'Oh, my God, be merciful —let me go back to my friends.'

'Your friends!' Pong Lo laughed drily. 'Listen, O White Jade . . . in less than a month there will be no British Consulate. Even now the Cantonese Army march toward Shang Tao in their thousands. The Concession shall be wiped out. China shall regain her own. The patriot who shot Sir Eric Hughes in Canhung missed . . . The English pig lives . . . but soon another shot may be fired . . . many shots . . . *and none of them will miss!*'

Pat put a hand to her whirling head. What did this Chinaman mean? The Cantonese marching upon Shang Tao? A revolution in progress? Was it true? During all these months while she had been a prisoner across the desert, had there been risings in China against the Europeans? Eric still lived. She was glad of that. But was Pong Lo merely trying to frighten her or did he speak the truth when he suggested that

every white man in Shang Tao would soon be wiped out?

'It isn't true,' she broke out hoarsely. 'The Europeans will protect their own.'

'We shall see,' said Li Pong Lo, with a slow smile. 'Time will tell, O White Jade.'

She looked desperately from side to side.

'Where am I? Where am I?'

'In the heart of Shang Tao in my poor home,' he answered, bowing, his hands in his sleeves.

'I am in Shang Tao . . . actually in the town?' she gasped incredulously.

'That is so,' answered Pong Lo.

The irony of it . . . the cruelty . . . to know she was in Shang Tao and yet buried . . . just as though she were dead . . . in the house of this Chinaman who was obviously both powerful and wealthy . . . how intolerable!

She gave a bitter cry.

'Let me go—oh, please, please let me go!'

'It grows dark,' murmured Pong Lo, ignoring her agonised appeal. 'Let us have light.'

He clapped his hands together. Immediately, as though by magic, some soft-footed slave in this house touched a switch, and one or two lights in the panelled room gleamed out behind exquisitely painted silken shades. In such soft, rich light the room looked doubly beautiful. But to Patricia it was sinister and horrible . . . a living tomb. She gave a long wail of despair, and, turning from Pong Lo, grasped Li Nang Wang's arm.

'Let me go . . . let me go!' she said piteously, the tears rolling down her thin cheeks.

He spoke to her in Chinese quite gently. His almond eyes regarded her mournfully. He was sick with love for her. Her tears, her obvious desire to get away from him, thwarted his passion. But her delicate white beauty still intrigued him, and he had no intention of letting her go. He meant to win her love—somehow.

Li Pong Lo translated for Pat what his brother said.

'He says that your tears are like pearls—even more beautiful and precious; that in this poor room of mine you

are more exquisite than any jewel or flower. He bids you cease from weeping, for as your lover he will teach you all delight.'

Pat shuddered and sickened. She shrank away from Nang Wang's slender hands. She flung herself on the cushions and cried heart-brokenly.

Nang Wang sighed. He drew a little ivory lute from one of his wide sleeves, and, squatting in a corner of the room, began to play. In his way he was a musician—an artist, and he had a sweet, dreamy, tenor voice. He sang quaint Chinese love-lyrics while he plucked at the strings of the lute.

Pat ceased crying and listened. But her silence was the silence of utter despair, and the sweet music only frightened her. Yes, she was more frightened of the passion of this dreamy, almond-eyed young Chinaman than she had been of Nyi Hung's sexless cruelty. And she was in Shang Tao; perhaps only a stone's throw from Sonia and Eric.

Her thoughts turned to Garvin. Garvin must be dead, she thought dully. Never, never again would she feel his lips on hers or his arms about her. He must have perished in that frightful volcanic disaster in Kara-Ning.

Li Pong Lo walked in his stately fashion out of the room. A few minutes later a slave-girl entered with a tray on which was set an exquisitely prepared meal: chicken and rice-balls; birds'-nests; some sweet, sticky fruit-salad; wine.

Nang Wang ceased playing and singing and pointed to the food timidly.

'Eat, O Exquisite,' he murmured.

Her nausea had passed, leaving her really hungry. The food tempted. It was more like English food than anything she had tasted for months. But while she ate she was terribly conscious of Nang Wang's dreamy, love-lit eyes.

XXX

Hundreds of miles away across the desert in the ruined city of Kara-Ning, that moonlit night, a little band of English and Americans were taken by a Chinese guide to the dwelling-place of Garvin Stewart, who was presumed to be mad.

Garvin's refuge proved to be a hut roughly erected and fashioned from some of the fallen timber and silk-stuffs from some half-demolished building in Kara-Ning. It lay in a clearing amidst a heap of ruins and faced the great temple of the Tiger God; now a gigantic mass of tumbled, broken columns and stones—nothing of its former glory left save the jagged ruin of the beautiful *pai-lou*.

Bill Trensham, his heart in his mouth, entered this hut and called his friend's name.

'Garvin! Garvin!'

A figure rose from the floor, fled past Trensham like a ghost and out into the moonlight. Bill shouted:

'Stop him ... stop him, you fellows!'

It was Randal Cullum, the American, and Dr. Wallace who caught that flying figure as it emerged from the hut. Bill hastened out and faced the half-crazy thing that had been his friend. He felt sick as he gazed at the terrible figure. Was it—could it be Garvin Stewart—the handsome, charming, witty Garvin of old days?

This man was a living skeleton, with long, brown, tangled hair and a long, matted beard. His black cotton suit, with baggy Chinese trousers, was tattered and filthy. But it was Garvin. Bill knew him from the shape of his head and hands and the eyes which were still Garvin's eyes—hazel, pathetically sunken, and at the moment brilliant with madness.

He struggled with the two men who held him, uttering little cries—some in English; some in Chinese. He kept on saying: 'Pat, Pat, I'll find you. .. I'll get you out. ... Pat, where are you?'

The little crowd of men stood gravely, awkwardly watching.

'My God!' said Morgan. 'The poor chap! How frightful!'

'Don't worry him, you fellows,' said Dr. Wallace. 'Just go quietly. Trensham, speak to him.'

'Garvin ... Garvin, old chap!' said Bill huskily. 'It's Trensham ... it's Bill Garvin, do you hear me?'

Garvin stood quite still and stared at him. He stared as though at a ghost—the ghost of some dear, departed fancy long since lost in the ruins of a wandering mind Garvin had lost his reason on that terrible day of the earthquake and eruption, when he had fled wildly outside the gates of Kara-Ning to look for Pat and had not found her.

Bill laid a hand on his shoulder. He felt Garvin shudder under it. The poor fellow was scared by the least touch . . such had been the hell through which he had passed these last few weeks.

'Garvin,' he said. 'Garvin, my dear old man It's Bill. We've come to find Pat, Garvin.'

Garvin was still For a long while he looked at Trensham . through him ... vacantly. Then, as Bill kept on calling his name, begging him to speak, he put a hand to his head and swayed slightly on his feet.

'Pat,' he mumbled. 'Pat.'

'We've come to find Pat, Garvin,' repeated Bill 'Buck up, old man ... pull yourself together.'

Garvin's wild, bright eyes fastened on him. And then, suddenly, reason seemed to return. The blood rushed to the thin, haggard face. His eyes were no longer vacant. Recognition glowed in them. He sobbed like a child, clutching at Bill's shoulders.

'My .. God ... Bill ... it's Bill ... my ... God!'

Then he went down like a log at Trensham's feet. Lay still; huddled up; so still that Bill's heart seemed to stop beating. He swung round to Dr. Wallace.

'Wallace . . . see to him. I say, Wallace . . . don't tell me the poor old chap is . . . dead!'

For it struck Bill in that tense moment that the shock of remembrance might easily have sapped poor Garvin's last shred of vitality. That the poor body could stand no more. And if Garvin died now, now that they had found him and were hoping against hope to find Patricia Moreland also—it would be a dreadful tragedy.

But Garvin was not dead. Dr. Wallace knelt by him for several minutes, giving him little sips of brandy from the flask he carried. With one finger on the weak, wavering pulse, he looked up at Trensham.

'It's all right. He's going to pull through, Trensham. Buck up.'

Ten minutes later Garvin Stewart was sitting upright on the ground, fully conscious, and with his reason normal once again. Weak, sick, pathetic, he sat staring at the little group of men whom Trensham gravely introduced to him.

'Our rescue-party, Garvin, old fellow. Come to look for you and Pat.'

Garvin put a hand to his forehead.

'Thanks . . . thanks awfully,' he said in a husky voice. And then, with a long-drawn shudder, looked about the moonlit, desolate scene and added: 'Pat . . . my poor little Pat . . . of course, she's . . . dead.'

The little group of men moved away tactfully, leaving Garvin with Bill. Bill lit a cigarette for Garvin, handed it to him, and stood staring gravely down at him.

'Why, old man . . . why do you think so?'

Garvin hid his eyes with one thin hand.

'I can remember everything now, Bill. That ghastly earthquake . . . getting out of the cell . . . trying to find Pat. Hopeless . . . utterly hopeless. She probably lies there.' He pointed despairingly at the ruins of the great temple. 'We shall never see her again.'

Trensham shook his head. He could not speak. He had nothing to say. But his heart was heavy within him. They had saved Garvin—poor old chap—but Pat, poor gallant little Pat, must certainly be dead if all that Garvin said was true.

'What happened to you, Bill?' Garvin asked dully.

Bill described his return to civilisation and his scheme to organise this band of happy adventurers who had volunteered to come across the desert and rescue him—Garvin and Pat. Garvin sighed deeply as he listened.

'Damn good of you all, old thing,' he said when Bill had finished. 'But I'm afraid it's too late. If Pat's dead . . . I don't much want to live.'

Trensham bit his lip. He was dumb in the presence of such grief. He knew the sincerity of it. And poor little Pat was gone . . . never to know that Garvin cared so much. The thing she had wanted to know—poor, brave Pat!

Suddenly Morgan appeared in a state of excitement.

'I say, you chaps . . . I say . . . I've discovered something . . about Miss Moreland.'

Garvin tottered on to his feet and stood leaning against Trensham's arm. His eyes burned.

'About Pat . . . what . . . my God, what?'

'Good news, Stewart,' said Morgan. 'I fancy Miss Moreland is alive and that we shall find her yet.'

'Tell me . . . quickly!' said Garvin hoarsely.

Morgan explained. He had been wandering outside the city walls, interesting himself in the refugees. He had found a man of some intelligence—recently a high-born citizen of Kara-Ning—and questioned him. This Chinaman volunteered the information that he had witnessed a friend, named Li Nang Wang, ride off from Kara-Ning on a camel, bearing the celebrated White Jade with him. Morgan investigated more closely, and ascertained that it was, without doubt, the English girl who had ridden away with Nang Wang.

'In which case, we may hope to trace them,' Morgan said. 'If they have got across the desert alive we shall certainly find them now.'

Trensham turned to Garvin,

'This is marvellous news,' he said. 'Garvin, there's hope.'

Garvin trembled from head to foot.

'Bill, if only it's true . . . if Pat did escape . . . and we can get her back. Bill!'

He stopped, overcome with emotion. Dr Wallace,

strolling back to the little group, eyed him professionally, and put in a cheery word of advice.

'What about coming along and having food and rest, Stewart. I'll give you a sleeping-draught. You've got to be well enough to push off at dawn to-morrow morning. There seems every reason to believe that Miss Moreland is alive and that we shall trace her.'

XXXI

Patricia Moreland had been a prisoner in the house of Li Pong Lo, blood-brother to Li Nang Wang, for a whole week. She had, personally, lost count of time. All days seemed the same—fraught with terror. All nights were long and dreadful. So far as she was concerned the week might have been a year. She did not even know when it was day or night because there was no window in her beautiful, octagonal prison-room and the lights burned always, save when she sank to sleep; then they were mysteriously lowered.

She knew that she was in Shang Tao. But it seemed to her that civilisation was far away. She heard no signs of street-life; no voices. The house itself seemed deathly quiet. Very occasionally she heard a muffled voice . . . a low, sinister laugh . . . or the beating of a gong. Every day Li Nang Wang came to see her; to sit by her and court her in his Chinese way with music and singing. Every time he came he brought her a present. The room was already full of beautiful things; but Nang Wang, from seemingly inexhaustible stores, brought gifts to his Lotus Lily which she knew must be beyond price: exquisite porcelain figures or bowls; jewelled toys, marvellous antique fans belonging to some Empress of a dead age, and one day he brought her a tiny Chinese dog, like a Pekingese, only very much smaller, with enormous black, bulging eyes and a coat of yellow, black-tipped silk. This wee creature had a collar studded with emeralds and was presented to Pat on a green satin cushion.

She took the tiny creature as she had taken all the other gifts—wearily, without interest. Nang Wang seemed eager that she should like the pet. Pat was sincerely fond of animals, and she would not have hurt the little Chinese dog, but she did not honestly like it. It was absurdly delicate and

snuffled all day as though it had a cold. She fed it; glad of something to do. Its name was Chu. It seemed to thrive in the over-heated, musky atmosphere of her prison.

Pat's thoughts were despairing, and sometimes she even contemplated suicide ... wondered if she could find some method of killing herself before Nang Wang could lay hands on her. She was not, however, permitted the luxury of suicide. The food was served always with chopsticks. She was never given a knife.

Another week ... yet another, went by. At the end of the third week Pat's nerves were so much on edge that she wondered if she would keep sane. She literally panted for fresh air, for sunlight, for liberty. And with every day that passed she told herself that Nang Wang's patience would soon come to an end.

Then one morning Nang Wang's brother entered her prison. He had not spoken to her for many days. He brought with him a beautiful robe of gold and rose. Gravely he gave it to her.

'For your bridal, O White Jade,' he said. 'Tonight my brother Li Nang Wang will carry you in the red bridal chair to his dwelling, which he has prepared for you close to mine.'

Pat began to tremble from head to foot.

'I shall not put on that robe, Mr. Pong Lo,' she said, 'and I demand that you set me free.'

'Let us not waste time in futile argument,' said Pong Lo quite gently. 'In half an hour, O White Jade, your lover, impatient for his bride, will come to you. He will wait no longer.'

Li Pong Lo went softly out of the room, leaving Patricia—paralysed, at breaking-point—huddled in a corner of her beautiful room; the gold and rose embroidered Chinese suit lying at her feet.

She covered her face with her hands and moaned.

'I won't! ... I won't! ... oh, I won't let him take me away! ... I won't be taken in the bridal chair! ... oh, Garvin, Garvin!'

But to call on Garvin's name seemed to her futile and as though she called upon the dead to help her. Garvin was

dead. She was utterly in the power of these yellow fiends. The patience of Li Nang Wang was exhausted. He had ceased to be content with feasting his eyes on the delicate beauty of the White Jade. He wanted her now for his wife.

Patricia did not move. For half an hour she sat huddled there, moaning. And then Li Nang Wang, in gorgeous ceremonial suit of palest amethyst satin, stitched with thread of gold, glided into the room. His almond eyes were brilliant with yearning in his smooth young face, which was the colour of old ivory. He held out slender hands to the crouching girl.

'White Jade,' he said softly. 'Will you not put on your bridal robes for me, your most humble lover? Will you not love me a little, O Exquisite?'

She shuddered and shrank away, her blue eyes tortured. In his way the young Chinaman was an aristocrat, and he had always been kind to her and gentle But the idea of marriage with him was repulsive and terrifying. He was of the Orient. She was of the Occident. The twain should never meet. She flung up her hands to him, piteously.

'Nang Wang, let me go ... let me go, if you love me!'

Mournfully he regarded her He did not understand what she said, although he read the distaste, the appeal on her face. She caught at his rich, amethyst sleeve. Tears rained down her thin cheeks.

'Nang Wang, let me go ... for pity's sake!'

He remained silent. The good in Li Nang Wang—for there was good; there is much good in all Chinese—warred with the evil. For an instant he thought of an exquisite bird which he had once caught and hung in a golden cage in his lovely home in Kara-Ning. He had loved its bright, rich plumage, its dainty movements. But it had drooped and pined in its prison, and never once had sung. One day he had opened the door of the cage and let the pretty creature fly away. As it flew, stretching its cramped wings joyously, it had trilled a song of gratitude. He had never forgotten that sudden burst of song. Somehow he connected the White Jade with the memory of that captive bird. She was so silent, so sad in her lovely prison If he let her go, would she not sing—as that

bird had sung—joyously? Would it not be worth his while to make a sacrifice and let her go?

Yet he loved her so. He wanted her so.

While he stood there, dreaming, pondering, there came a low, booming sound which echoed through Li Pong Lo's house. It was a sound that made Nang Wang stiffen and glance away from Pat toward the panelled door. It made Pat sit up and listen, every nerve in her body quivering. She knew that sound. It was the muffled boom of a big gun.

Guns! Perhaps British guns! Had the revolution, of which Pong Lo had spoken, commenced in Shang Tao?

Li Nang Wang slipped from the room as noiselessly as he had entered it. Pat sat upright, her head flung back, her ears straining for more sound. And it came again ... the boom-boom of a heavy gun.

'Oh, God!' said Pat aloud. 'Oh, God, if only a shell would land on this house and demolish me before that man can touch me!'

Li Nang Wang came back. With him came his brother. The fat face of Pong Lo was not smiling. It was dark and furious, and his thin lips were drawn back from his discoloured teeth in a snarl.

'The English have sent ships ... may the gods curse them!' he was saying to Nang Wang in staccato Chinese. 'The whole town is in an uproar. The Marines are even now marching through the streets.'

'What, then, of my marriage?' asked Nang Wang.

'It would be wiser to squeeze the life from the White Jade's throat and fling her body into the river at nightfall than to house a white woman during the revolution,' said Pong Lo, with an oath.

Nang Wang's serene young face puckered. His sloe-black eyes glittered with sudden rage.

'My honourable brother would be warned not to lay hands on my White Jade,' he said softly.

'Young fool!' spat the elder Chinaman. 'If the English get to hear of this girl being in your possession it will endanger your life and the lives of all in my illustrious family.'

'She shall not die,' said Nang Wang. His voice was silky,

but his almond eyes still glittered.

Pong Lo's fat face was very ugly.

'You shall both die before the English pigs are given the chance to bring dishonour or disaster on my illustrious household,' he said through his teeth

Pat was watching them breathlessly, without being able to understand what they said. She only guessed that the brothers were quarrelling. The next thing she knew was that Li Nang Wang had sprung at the throat of the elder Chinaman. She crouched in her corner and watched their struggle.

A dagger flashed in Nang Wang's hand. Pong Lo gave a gurgling moan and slid on to the floor in a grotesque heap. Nang Wang's dagger was in his side and the life-blood was dyeing his dark blue jacket.

Li Nang Wang had fought for the life of the White Jade. But she did not know it. She imagined they had been fighting for possession of her She sent up scream after scream as Nang Wang dropped his knife and glided across the room to her. She sprang away before he could touch her, knocking over the priceless Ming vase, which shattered in a thousand fragments at his feet.

'Keep away from me' Don't touch me,' she shrieked '*Don't touch me!*'

He stood still a moment, his face waxen, his almond eyes half perplexed, half desperate He had fought and killed his blood-brother in order to preserve her life. Did she not understand? Would she not reward him? Her screams hurt him poignantly.

And then, suddenly, the silken-panelled door of the room was smashed in by the crashing of heavy fists Half a dozen men—white men in stained khaki shirts and riding-breeches—poured into that little lamp-lit, exquisite, sinister room. They were tired and travel-worn; their eyes were bloodshot and sore after long days of burning sunlight and endless desert sands But they were triumphant. They had achieved that for which they had set out. They had traced Nang Wang from Kara-Ning to Feng Hsi and from Feng Hsi to Shang Tao.

Pat's dilated eyes saw only one face ... the thin brown,

infinitely beloved face of the man she had long since thought of as dead. Speechlessly she stared at him; then, with one great sobbing cry, leaped across the broken Ming vase and the fallen pedestal into his open arms.

'Garvin ... Garvin ... *Garvin!*'

Her cry reached the heart of every man in that room. For a moment there was a poignant silence. Garvin Stewart caught and held the girl; picked up the little, pitifully thin figure in the Chinese suit and held it against his breast.

'Pat, my dear ... thank God!'

She was too stunned with the shock, the unexpected vision of him, to speak again. She could only lie there in his arms, crying ... crying as though her heart would break.

Then Bill Trensham, who had helped Garvin smash in the panel of that room, pointed at Li Nang Wang.

'That must be the devil who took Miss Moreland from Kara-Ning,' he said. 'Some of you fellows had better hold me before I lay hands on him, or, by God, I'll thrash him to a jelly.'

'Hang on, Trensham,' said Dr. Wallace, who was staring about him curiously. 'Who's the swine on the floor?'

Bill looked down at the twisted body of Pong Lo.

'I don't know. They've been having a free fight, so far as I can see, before we turned up.'

'As for you,' said Trensham, turning back to Nang Wang, 'the police are waiting for you outside this house, my man.'

Li Nang Wang did not understand. But he knew that for him the end had come. He neither flinched nor attempted to whine for mercy. In his way, the young Chinaman was truly an aristocrat—proud and brave.

He just turned his mournful almond eyes to the girl in Garvin's arms. Then, swift as lightning, he put his right forefinger, on which gleamed an immense topaz, up to his lips. He smiled, said a few words in his own language, then dropped like a stone at Trensham's feet.

Dr. Wallace knelt beside him and examined him. He looked up at Bill with a grim smile.

'Done himself in, Trensham ... Poison ... in that ring ... very cute.'

'What did he say, Morgan?' asked Bill, turning to the

expert, who was going into rhapsodies over the Nankin bowl.

'Oh—er—he said, "White Jade beloved—goodbye!"'

'Humph!' grunted Bill. 'Yellow swine, damn him!'

But Pat, from her heaven in Garvin's arms, said:

'Poor Nang Wang. In his way, Garvin, I believe he really loved me. He was always quite kind.'

'Kind!' echoed Garvin. He shuddered and laid his face against her neck. 'You poor, poor little thing. You've been through so many horrors—it's been enough to unhinge your mind.'

'Nothing matters now,' she said— 'now that we've found each other again. Oh, Garvin, how did you know I was here?'

He told her how the rescue-party had traced Nang Wang and Wu Ts'in from Kara-Ning to Feng Hsi. There the old amah in the eating-house had betrayed Nang Wang's movements for a little pile of money which to her meant a fortune, and once in Shang Tao, they had not found it difficult to trace Nang Wang to his brother's house with the aid of the Shang Tao police.

'But what happened to you during the earthquake?' she asked.

'I'll tell you all that later, darling. But now you're going to be taken to Sonia Mason, and you're going straight to bed to be nursed up for a few days, then you're coming back to England on the first possible boat—as my wife.'

She gave a long, long sigh.

'Garvin, it sounds too good to be true,' she said brokenly. 'Are we really out of the wood at last?'

'We are, sweetheart,' he smiled down at her. 'But Shang Tao is in a ghastly state. The Marines landed this morning. The Cantonese are marching on us steadily. All the Europeans are to evacuate—get home—soon as they can.'

He set her on her feet, then, with an arm supporting her, gravely introduced her to the gallant little band of men who had faced all the dangers and discomforts of the desert for their sakes.

'Pat, these are our very good friends to whom we owe our release,' he said 'Cullum, Morgan, Dr Wallace —' he

indicated each one in turn, and each one came forward and shook hands with the golden-haired girl who looked so pathetically frail and terror-haunted.

Then Garvin picked Pat up in his arms again and carried her out into the sunlight. As the fresh air blew upon her face and the sun dazzled her eyes she gave a little sound that was half a sob, half a laugh. She was free ... free again. And she was with Garvin ... Garvin who had not died.

In the car which drove them swiftly to Sir Eric Hughes' house, where Sonia Mason joyfully awaited her friend, she sat with her fair little head against Garvin's shoulder and one of his hands against her lips.

One week later, on a British liner sailing from Shang Tao to England, a very charming double wedding took place. Patricia Moreland and Garvin Stewart were the couple who excited most interest, because by now the incredible experiences of these two in the Chinese desert had become public property; were spoken of breathlessly, excitedly; their amazing story repeated as one of the wonders of the age.

The other happy pair, Sonia Mason and Bill Trensham, were not quite so much in the public eye, although it was a known fact that Trensham had shared many of Garvin's experiences and that it was through him and his zealous rescue-party that Garvin and Patricia had ever returned to safety and each other.

At any rate, as Pat said to her husband on that golden wedding-night while the liner cut swiftly through the foam:

'Our happiness would not have been complete without Bill's marriage, would it, Garvin?'

'Indeed it wouldn't,' Garvin answered. 'Dear old Bill. He's found the right girl in Sonia, and they're thoroughly, stupidly in love.'

'So am I,' said Pat.

Garvin, who was standing on deck leaning over the rails, looking down at the phosphorescent water, put an arm about his beautiful young wife. They had sailed from Shang Tao at eleven o'clock that morning. China was already many miles behind them.

'We've seen terrible, wonderful things together, you and I, my beloved,' he said in a low tone. 'And in some ways I suppose we can look back on them now without worrying, but, all the same, I hope never to see China or a yellow face again.'

'I hope the same,' she said, with a little shiver. 'I just long for England and our home, Garvin. We shall be back in time for autumn.'

'Yes; a spaniel, a gun, a pheasant or two,' said Garvin contentedly. 'And oh, my sweet, you as my wife! That's the one thing which will remain to me a miracle.'

Slim, delicately lovely in her white evening gown, with a big pink flower on one shoulder, Pat slipped into her husband's arms and pressed her golden head against his breast.

'You've left the White Jade in China, Garvin darling,' she said, with a soft little laugh 'Now you've got a thoroughly English "Pat" for ever.'

The stars glittered. The ship ploughed softly through the dark water. And the moon shone down upon them The same old moon that had shone on them in the great Nobi Desert, on the Tsi-Fu River, and in Kara-Ning—in the China that, for these wedded lovers, was no more.

Patricia Moreland has always longed to go to China, to experience at first hand the exotic, mysterious Orient. When her old friend Sheila Mason suggests that she accompany her on a trip to Shang Tao, Pat is delighted. Little does she suspect what China has in store for her.

Within days of her arrival Pat spots Garvin Stewart, one of the many men who had wanted to marry her – and whom she had treated so heartlessly – back in England. To Pat's dismay Garvin refuses to acknowledge her. Yet this rebuff is as nothing compared to the dangerous lasciviousness of Chai Yin, a man who will stop at nothing to gain possession of the beautiful English girl...

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